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Christian's defence against infidelity

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CHRISTIAN AUTHORS,

WITH

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS.

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THE REVP. WM. BATES D.D.

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THE

CHRISTIAN'S DEFENCE

AGAINST

INFIDELITY.

CONSISTING OF,

1. LESLIE'S SHORT AND EASY METHOD WITH THE DEISTS.
2. LYTTELTON'S OBSERVATIONS ON ST. PAUL.
3. DODDRIDGE'S EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.
4. BATES ON THE DIVINITY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.
5. OWEN ON THE SELF-EVIDENCING LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE.
6. BAXTER ON THE DANGER OF MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY

THOMAS CHALMERS, D. D.
PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

GLASGOW:

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THERE are several ways in which a man, who practises the art of divination, might try to make good his pretensions to this supernatural endowment. He might do so by attempting to pronounce on the kind and the quantity of money which I have about my person. He might pass a confident utterance on a matter that is hidden from every human eye but my own, even on the number and the character of those pieces of coin which I am carrying about with me, —and this description of his may be rigidly true, in all its varied particulars,—and at different times may he make distinct and repeated trials of the same kind, and succeed in every one of them. And surely it is conceivable, that these examples of an unfailing coincidence, between what he says, and what I myself know of the subject, may be so striking, and so multiplied, and so obviously free of all the symptoms and all the preparations of jugglery, as to leave upon my mind, not merely a firm, but also a most just and rational conviction, that the man is what he pretends to be; that there is a reach of discernment about him, beyond all that is known of the powers or the

principles of nature; that in fact, he has established himself to be a miraculous personage, and by evidence, too, of such a kind, as, with a man of sober and enlightened judgment, might be altogether irresistible.

Now, it is to be remarked of such evidence, that, in the main strength of it, and in the proper and original impression of it, it is addressed exclusively to myself. I may make known to others the whole history of this wonderful transaction. I may report to them all the cases of successful divination which have been accomplished upon me. But still the evidence of these cases has to pass through the intervening medium of my testimony. Before that others can feel the same power of evidence with myself, they must be made to undergo the same treatment; or the same divination must be practised successively and individually upon each of them. They may choose to discredit my testimony. They may distrust my powers of memory and observation. They may suspect a collusion between me and an artful pretender. They may look upon me as a man either of dishonest purpose, or of diseased imagination. They may muster up a thousand possibilities, to ward away from them a conviction, which I know and am assured to be a just one. And thus it is that I may, on the one hand, be surrounded by the incredulity of all my fellows, and I may be assailed, in every direction, by the imputations of falsehood or fanaticism; and yet, with the personal access I have had to an evidence to which none of my acquaintances have been admitted, and with a proper confidence in the soundness of my own recollections, and with the

sense of a single-minded integrity throughout the whole of this business, I may, on the other hand, though accosted at every turn by the ridicule and the reproaches of my acquaintances, be fully warranted to place my immoveable confidence in him with whom I have held the intercourse of all these intimate and peculiar communications.

But let us now vary the supposition, and conceive that our extraordinary personage embarks his pretensions on another and a higher species of divination; that, instead of attempting to divine the money which is in my pocket, he attempts to divine the thoughts which are in my heart; that, laying claim to the wondrous prerogative of supernaturally knowing what is in man, he offers to scrutinize my mind, and to read to me the varied characters which, in the shape of opinion, and desire, and ruling passion, and prevailing infirmity of temper, stand engraven in its chamber of imagery; that he unfolds to me the workings of my own soul, and lays before me a picture of the inner man, that can be vividly recognized by the eye of my own conscience; that he proves to me, how this little world of self, with all its affections and its tendencies, which stand so hidden from general observation, by a thick and an impalpable veil, is altogether naked and open before him; that he makes me perceive, by his insight into the thoughts and intents of my heart, how he is indeed a most skilful and a most enlightened discerner; that, by his piercing inspection into the secrecies of my bosom, he can so divide asunder my soul and spirit, as to make every one of them manifest in his sight. Why, is it not conceivable, that in this way, too, there may be

multiplied upon me the instances of a penetration far above the powers of humanity; that every new case of such a divination may serve to strengthen my confidence in him who performs it; and that, at length, I may be so overpowered by the evidence which he thus brings to bear upon me, as to give my full consent to all his pretensions, and to embark my every prospect, and my every determination, on his authority, as a messenger from God?

And yet, when I do so, I do it upon the strength of evidence, directed individually to myself. I cannot make another man the partaker of this evidence. I cannot possibly put him upon that station of advantage which I occupy. I cannot translate into his bosom my own direct and immediate consciousness of the movements which are going on in my bosom; nor can I furnish him with a window of observation, through which he may note the coincidence between those divinations which have been attempted on my mind, and my mind, which is the subject of these divinations. I am the only man living who can be made directly to perceive this coincidence, and to me exclusively and appropriately belongs the main strength of the evidence that is founded upon it. There lies an impassable barrier between me and my next door neighbour, in virtue of which I find it impossible to make a full or an adequate communication of this evidence to him. There may be divinations conceived, where the subject of them is equally accessible to all men. But the peculiarity of the divination that I am now insisting on, is, that the subject of it is accessible only to the individual on whom it is practised. Ere my neighbour can possess the

evidence which it affords, he must be made the subject of a distinct divination. Before this takes place, he has nothing to rest upon but my testimony, which he may reject as false, or which he may deride as fanciful, or which he may utterly despise, as symptomatic of folly and of superstitious weakness. Still, however, in the face of all this, I may obstinately adhere to my own conviction, and be right in doing so. My contemptuous neighbour has no access to the materials upon which my judgment is founded. He cannot bring himself into a state of contiguity with my mind, nor obtain such a view of its workings, as to see how good the evidence is that I have for my conviction; nor, until he has forced his way within the penetralia of the inner chamber, will I, with a right sense of my integrity, and a right confidence in my judgment, hold him entitled to pronounce it a bad evidence. I alone have access to the depositions of my own consciousness. And I have faith in their veracity. And I can judge of the accordancy between them, and the divinations of the man who calls himself a prophet. And I may see it to be an accordancy so close, and so minutely variegated, and so often exemplified, and so sustained throughout all the successions of my experience and my history, that, believing it to be miraculous, I may say, and say with justness, that surely God is in him of a truth. And thus may I exhibit, not merely an inflexible, but a sound and philosophically consistent faith, even in circumstances where, abandoned by the sympathy of all my fellows, I am traduced as a hypocrite, or reviled as an enthusiast.

There is something to confirm all this in Scripture

history. Our Saviour, in the course of his conversation with the woman of Samaria, achieved upon her a work of divination. He read to her a passage out of her present and her by-gone history; and she was so far impressed with the circumstance, as to say, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." She repeated the circumstance to her countrymen; and it is recorded, that some of them bore such respect to her testimony, that they believed on Jesus, "for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did." But though some, not all; for it is further said, that "many more believed because of his own word." True, it is not said that this word carried the same kind of evidence to them, that it did to the woman of Samaria. It is not said, that, disbelieving her testimony, they were at length made to believe, by means of a similar divination practised upon themselves. But we may, at least, gather from the passage, that the evidence on which their faith rested did not lie in any external miracle. This is not what they alleged as the ground of their faith. But they "said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

But any deficiency of information in this passage, is amply made up in other passages. The miracle of tongues, for instance, held out to the notice of the world, by the first teachers of Christianity, should have compelled the attention of all whom they addressed, to the subject-matter of their testimony. A few moments of serious and candid examination, would have convinced them of such a reality in this

exhibition, as entitled the first preachers of the Gospel to a further and a respectful hearing. But there were many in those days who wanted this seriousness and this candour; and they passed a rejection so summary upon the message that was proposed, that they would not even listen to the terms of it; and they put it away from them at the very threshold of its earliest intimations; and we are, accordingly, told by the Apostle, that the gift of tongues, instead of exciting their inquiry, excited their ridicule, insomuch, that they pronounced those who exercised it, to be mad; and we also read of certain despisers, who, upon the very same exhibition, said, mocking, that "these men are full of new wine;" and thus it is that they persisted in their unbelief, and wondered, and perished. Now, the way in which we understand the gift of tongues to have been a sign unto them, is, that it sealed their condemnation. It convicted them of a dishonest partiality on the side of falsehood. It made the Gospel the savour of death unto death unto them. The sign of tongues was a sign which they spake against; and this wilful, perverse, unfair, and, at all hazards, determined opposition, drew upon them the fulfilment of such sayings, as, that unless those works had been done among them which had never been done before, they had not had sin; and that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for those who witnessed such miracles, but who so loved the darkness rather than the light, as to resist the impression of them.

Thus much for those who believed not. And as to those who believed, it does not appear to us that

it was the miracle of tongues, or indeed any external miracle whatever, which wrought in them the saving faith of the New Testament. A previous miracle might, in many cases, have been the instrument by which their attention was gained: but we think that the evidence upon which their conversion hinged, beamed upon their minds from the subject-matter of the testimony. It was in the act of listening to what is called the prophecy, or, (taking this term according to its undoubted sense in many passages of Scripture,) it was in the act of listening to the exposition of Christian doctrine, that they felt the impression of that evidence which we have already insisted on—even the evidence of such a divination as was beyond all that could be accomplished by the sagacity of man. The truth of what the Apostles told them was made manifest to their consciences. What their Christian teachers said they were, they felt themselves to be; and they recognized the coincidence, and they were arrested by it. They gave them credit for a supernatural commission, when they discerned such a reach of penetration into the secrecy of their bosoms, as they judged to be supernatural. And the evidence they thus obtained, was not diluted by its transmission upon a vehicle of testimony, from the experience of one man to the hearing of another man. All who believed shared in the same experience. Each of them was made the subject of a separate divination. Each carried home the word spoken, and found it to tally with all that he perceived of his own character. The evidence came with the whole force of its powerful and primitive impression upon every conscience.

And we think that nothing more needs to be said, in order to understand the kind of influence by which, when the first teachers prophesied, or expounded their message and their doctrine, "and there came in one that believed not, or one unlearned, he was convinced of all, he was judged of all: and thus were the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so, falling down on his face, he worshipped God, and reported that God was in them of a truth."

But these gifted teachers of our faith not only spoke to the men of their own age, they also wrote for the men of other ages. They have left behind them an enduring memorial of their doctrine and their testimony. They have graven it on an imperishable record; and we know not a more deeply interesting question, within the whole compass of Theology, than—Whether, while the word of the Apostles is thus transmitted by writing, the evidence which lay in that word at its first and its oral delivery, is transmitted along with it to succeeding generations? May we, in the reading of that word, gather the same evidence for its truth, which the unbelievers, and the unlearned in the apostolic age, did in the hearing of it? In one short sentence, Has this evidence descended? Has it been actually translated into the pages of the Bible? Does this book stand to us in the place of its human composers, who have long ere now been consigned to the silence of the grave? Can it do by itself now, what they personally, and of themselves, did then? Can it evince such a power of divination into the secrecies of the heart, as to bear, upon its own forehead, the attestation of God being in it of a truth? An un-

lettered man of the present day, knows nothing of its external evidence. He is an utter stranger to the erudition and the history of the eighteen hundred years which have elapsed, since the first promulgation of Christianity in the world. It is all a dark and an unknown interval to him. Nor can he fetch a single argument, for the establishment of his faith, from across an abyss which looks so obscure and so fathomless. Now the question is—May he fetch any such argument from the book itself? When, in the act of reading it, the word is brought nigh unto him, is there any thing within it by which it can announce its own authority, and hold out, to a simple and untaught reader, the light of its own evidence? Does the word written inherit all the powers of the word spoken? Does there emanate from the doctrine, as recorded by the Apostles, that virtue to arrest, and to carry the conviction, which actually did emanate from the same doctrine, as told by the Apostles? Insomuch, that the Bible shall be not merely the messenger of its own contents, but shall also be the messenger of its own credentials; that wherever it goes, it shall bear abroad with it the legible and the satisfying inscription of its own truth; that by the light which beams from its pages, it shall make known the celestial character which it wears, and the celestial origin from which it sprung; that it shall emit, upon every side of it, the lesson of its rightful authority; and that, though it borrow not one particle of aid from the skill and the scholarship of its controversial defenders, it shall be able to speak for itself, to find its way even among the humblest of our cottages, to

reclaim, and to convince, and to enlighten their darkest population, and to put the stamp of a sound and a clear intelligence on all the discipleship which it earns among them.

We do not see how we could have abridged our observations at any former point of this argument; and, after all, have we only arrived on the margin of a vast and untrodden field, and feel ourselves placed on the mere threshold of a subject far too big and too unwieldy for the present Essay. We will not attempt the impossibility of entertaining the question we have just now started, in such a way as to meet the every doubt, and to pursue the every illustration, and at length to bestow upon our argument its complete and conclusive establishment. We firmly believe, that there is no one position in Theology, which can be more strongly and more philosophically sustained, than the self-evidencing power of the Bible. For a full and satisfactory exposition of this subject, we must refer our readers to Dr. Owen's Treatise, in the present Volume, "On the Self-Evidencing Light and Power of the Scriptures," and all we shall do, at present, is just to bring forward as much, in the way of remark, as we have room for, on the important point which has been suggested.

When this evidence first dawns on the mind of an inquirer, there is one striking point of accordancy which generally offers itself to his contemplation; even that accordancy which subsists between the inward experience of his own heart, and the outward description of it that is laid before him in the Bible; and is, in fact, like the exact

correspondence which obtains between the cipher and the thing to be deciphered. There is no one announcement which the Bible maintains more steadily, and which it keeps by more perseveringly, and which, in opposition to all the wisdom of this world, and to all the delusion and vanity of the people who live in it, is it ever holding forth more fearlessly, and more unrelentingly, than the utter alienation and worthlessness of man in reference to God. It makes the entire corruption of our species the basis of its system. It never either questions or qualifies this position; but takes it up, and proceeds upon it; and we recognize it at every turn as the great and the pervading element of Christianity. And when a man, unwarped from all the influences by which he has hitherto been blinded, looks inwardly upon himself, and perceives that it is really so,—when enabled to pierce his way through all those plausibilities of character which have hitherto lulled him into a deceitful security, he is made to see how utterly devoid he is of what may be called the main or the elemental principle of righteousness, even a principle of allegiance to God,—when it becomes evident to him, that at the very moment that the virtues of instinct or of natural endowment, throw a lustre of moral accomplishment around him, and draw upon his person the eye and the homage of society, he is neither thinking of the God who made him, nor making his will the standard of obedience; but, with the full bent of his affections to the creature rather than to the Creator, he is in fact making the world that divinity to which he renders the incense of a perpetual offering; and withholding his heart from Him who

claims the ascendency over all its desires, and giving it up in unreserved devotedness to the idols of sense and of time. Why, when he thinks of this as the very turning point of the controversy between God and his creatures; that to do this is to trample on the authority of the first and the greatest commandment; that let him be kind or amiable, or generous or upright, there is that universal attribute of the carnal mind, even enmity against God, which spreads itself over the whole system of his feelings, and deeply infuses the very best of them with the guilt and the malignity of sin,—when he contrasts his forgetfulness of God, and his utter indifference to God, with the weight of those unnumbered obligations that he owes to Him who called him into being, and who enriched him with all his faculties, and who gives him every breath, and whose right hand upholds him continually,—when thus enabled to descry, through the mists of a pride that is now mortified, and the false brilliancies of an imagination that is now arrested, how, with a heart withheld from God, he in fact has been carrying about with him, from the first infancy of his recollection, the very seed and principle of rebellion against his Maker,—when he comes to see all this, and, furthermore, to see how the same lesson, which his now enlightened experience is reading to him, in characters so distinct and so vigorous in his own person, stands engraven as vigorously and as distinctly on the record of Scripture; how the very thing has all along been most firmly, and in the face of this world's resistance, stated in his Bible, which is now opening upon his conviction, from the clearer

view that he now takes of the lineaments of his own heart. Is it, after all this, to be looked at as a mystery, that he should proffer his respect to a volume which tells him what no other volume ever told him, but which he now sees, by his own discernment, to be true; that he should feel constrained towards that book in which he has found such an exact image of himself, as is not to be found within the whole range of human literature; or when an utterance of the Bible thus meets with its counterpart in his own bosom, and it be an utterance which nature never could have prompted, because revolting to all the pride and to all the sagacity of nature, shall he be any longer suspended in doubt or in amazement, though so convinced and so judged, and with the secrets of his heart so made manifest, his belief should at length be overpowered by this and similar instances of such a wondrous divination?

There is no room for dilating on other instances, or for describing the whole compass of Scripture, with the view of pointing out the every passage from which there glances, on the reader whose eyes have been opened, this evidence of divination. We cannot show how the very offer of such a Saviour as can alone quell the apprehensions of sinful nature, and makes the conscience feel at peace with God, is virtually in itself an act of divination—or how the distaste of nature for the truths of the Gospel, a distaste asserted in the records of the Gospel itself, forms another striking example of divination—or how the way in which this distaste is made to give place to a spiritual relish, and a spiritual discern-

ment of these things, tallies with other verses of the Bible, and goes to swell and to multiply the evidences of divination—or how the actual revolution, felt by every believer whose heart is now open to the charm and the significancy of that which he at one time recoiled from in nauseous antipathy, forms an argument here of a weightier character than that of divination. We cannot venture at present on so wide a field: the evidence is in fact too abundant for it. The number of verses is too great which exhibits a harmony between the doctrines of the Bible and the findings of experience. But it may at least be remarked, that it is an evidence out of which something may be gathered to meet the case of every inquirer. For first, if he be in a state previous to conversion, this evidence accumulates upon him by every statement he finds about the deadness, and the darkness, and the dread of his alienated bosom in reference to God—and he feels it to agree with the testimony of his own conscience—and he sees in the Bible the reflection of his own most intimate experience, as it tells him that he is living without hope and without God in the world, and that a moral impotency has got hold of him, and that he cannot render, in his own strength, a spiritual obedience, and that there lies upon him the utter impossibility of conceiving love to God, whom, without the faith of the New Testament, he ever will look upon as a distant and inaccessible Lawgiver. And secondly, if he be on the eve of conversion, he finds out other points of accordancy. He looks at the Gospel, and sees there what he can see no where else—a something to tranquillize the fears of guilt, to meet its

necessities, to bring the sinner, who by nature stands afar off, near unto God—and as he feels this wondrous virtue of the peace-speaking blood, he believes that an application so suitable *to* man, could only proceed from him who knew what was *in* man. And, finally, if he be already converted, this evidence strengthens upon him every day; and pours a growing light upon his path; and when he looks at his Bible, he sees that it contains within its pages an exact transcript of his own feelings and his own exercises; and as he looks at his own heart, he sees the intimations of the Bible realized upon all its movements; and the points of accordancy between the outward die and the inward mould, he perceives to be far too minute and manifold and inscrutable to have been divined by the sagacity of man—and the conviction meets upon him with every new step in the progress of his history—and just as the Christians of old believed that God was in the apostles of a truth, so does a Christian of this day believe that God is in the Bible, which the Apostles have left behind them—and to the truth of this belief, all the thoughts, and all the transactions of his inner man, lend their testimony—as he feels within himself the conflict of two opposing principles, and the habitual prevalence of one of them; or as he feels within himself the faith which worketh by love, and the love which yieldeth obedience; or as he feels within himself the process of sanctification; or as he feels within himself the peace and the joy, and the spirit of adoption, which sounds to the world an unintelligible mystery; or, as he finds on his own person the fulfilment of prayer, and the fruits of the Spirit,

and a growing conformity to the example of Christ, and a growing meetness for the inheritance of a blissful eternity.

But we will not oppress ourselves with the magnitude of this argument, by attempting to dispose of it, in all its parts, and in all its illustrations, within the compass of an Essay; and we shall close this part of our argument by the three following remarks:—

1. This argument, so far from precluding the testimony of the Spirit, is the very argument which the Spirit brings before us in the exercise of his legitimate functions. He tells us of nothing that is out of the field of revelation, or out of the field of human experience. The telescope does not add a single character to the distant landscape, but brings home to our discernment all the actual and antecedent characters which existed in it. In like manner, the Spirit of God adds nothing to the word of God. He makes use of the word as his instrument. He gives us a clear view of those characters which stand engraven upon the Bible, and of those lineaments which Nature hath drawn upon our own hearts; and therefore gives us a clear view of that accordancy of divination out of which the whole of this argument emerges.

2. The evidence which is thus furnished, is, no doubt, an internal evidence; but it is altogether dissimilar from that internal evidence, which some would most presumptuously and most unphilosophically rear, as an accordancy between what they see in the Bible, and what they imagine to be the plans and the processes of the Divinity. This evidence is

nearer home, more within the compass of human experience, and in every way more consonant to the cautious and solid temper of the modern philosophy, and rests exclusively on the wondrous harmony that subsists between what is seen in the Bible, and what is felt within the familiar recesses of one's own heart, and the authoritative informations of one's own consciousness.

3. It is an evidence that might be felt, in all its strength, by an unlettered workman—and he may have well warranted convictions upon the subject—and yet, from the very nature of the evidence, he may be unable to pass an adequate communication of it into another's bosom—and he may be loaded with contempt for a set of impressions which to others are utterly inexplicable: and thus it is a very possible thing, that what is called madness, may be soberness and truth—and what is branded as Methodism, may be indeed the soundest and the most enlightened philosophy.

There is another very palpable argument for the reality of some such evidence as we have tried to illustrate, which it is impossible to overlook; and the question we have to put is, What is that evidence on which a man becomes a believer within the limits of Christendom, where the Bible is circulated? And we would appeal to the ministers of Christ, for they can speak experimentally upon this question, —tell us, amongst all the transitions you have witnessed from darkness to the marvellous light of the Gospel, what the effective consideration was which accomplished such a change! Tell us, ye men whose office it is to preside over this department of

human nature, who have long been conversant with the phenomena which it offers, and have doubtless treasured up in your remembrance, some cases of conversion, where the after life of the individual stood so nobly contrasted with his by-gone history, as to attest, in characters the most decisive and undeniable, the reality of his faith! Tell us, if you have ever detected the instrumental cause of that faith—or what that was which the convert was looking to, when this principle dawned into existence—or from what quarter of contemplation the light of truth beamed upon his understanding—or where, in the whole compass of that field upon which the thoughts of man can possibly expatiate, did he meet with the charm which cleared all his doubts and all his darknesses away from him; which established his feet on a way of rectitude that he had never before walked, and animated his bosom by that Spirit of power and of a sound mind, the workings of which he had never before experienced! O where lieth the mystery of these persuasive influences which must have gathered around him, at that point of his earthly career, when the doctrine of Christ first took an ascendency over his judgment, and the morality of Christ shed its rich and beauteous accomplishments over his practice and conversation! Did it lie, we ask, in any thing external to the subject-matter of the testimony? or did it lie within the subject-matter of the testimony itself? Did the light lie in that history which the documents of antiquity enable you to give of the Book? or did it lie in that doctrine and information which stand engraven upon its pages? Did it lie in the exhibition

you made of the proof for the communication? or did it lie in the exhibition you made of the substance of the communication? Tell us the argument of that awakening sermon under which you remember some secure hold of infidelity to have been stormed. Was it in the act of combating the hostility of literature, when, in all the pride of erudition, you did demonstrate the faithful conveyance of the Scriptures of truth from the first age of Christianity? Or was it in the act of combating the hostility of nature's blindness and nature's opposition, when you opened these Scriptures, and made the truth itself manifest to the consciences of men? This last we imagine to be the only way of converting the souls of men. It is not done by descending into the depths of the earth, and there fighting the battles of the faith against the dark and the visioned spectres of geology. It is not done by ascending up into the heavens, and fetching down from these wondrous regions some sublime and specious illustration. It is done, by bringing the word nigh unto them—by entering with it into the warm and the well-known chambers of their own consciousness—by making them feel the full force of its adjustments to all their wants and to all their experience—by telling them of that sin, under the conviction of which nature tries to forget God, or would fly affrighted from his presence—and of that Saviour who alone can hush the alarms of nature. These are the lessons which can do to this very hour what they did in the days of the apostles. They can make the unbeliever and the unlearned feel himself to be judged of all, and convinced of all—and thus

can manifest the secrets of his heart, so as that he shall acknowledge God to be in them of a truth.

And here, by the way, we cannot but remark, what a powerful argument the subject we have been illustrating furnishes in behalf of Bible and Missionary Societies. Did we propose to make our next door neighbour a believer unto life, we should feel that the most direct instrumentality we could bring to bear upon him, would be to ply his conscience with the word of the testimony. And, did we go to the neighbour beyond him, we would just do the same thing. And though, in passing from one man to another, we widen the distance from our own home, we would never think of making any change on the kind or on the method of application, by which we tried to subdue them all unto the faith of the Gospel. And in this way would we proceed till we got to the verge of Christendom—and if such be the right and the effective treatment for the last man we found within its limits, tell us, for in truth we cannot perceive it, why, on leaving him, it should not be a treatment equally right and equally effective for the very first man we meet with beyond it. How can the evidence lose its power in the transition which we make at this particular moment? What ingredient of strength has fallen away from it? What is it that the man on this side of the line has, which the man on the other side of the line has not? Neither of them is made to witness a miracle. Neither of them has heard a single word about the original vouchers for Christianity, or about the faithful transmission of its credentials along the line of many generations. Neither of them has been ini-

tiated into the scholarship of its argumentative evidence; and if you will just demand no more for the Christianization of the latter, than what you count to be enough for the Christianization of the former, it were easy to prove, that the man who is standing without has just as much to help on his discipleship as the man who is standing within. Both of them have the same mental constitution. Both are in the same state of darkness and alienation from God. Both labour under the same fears, and may have the same feeling of their moral and spiritual necessities. In a word, each of them possesses a bosom alike framed to meet, by its responding movements, the message and the information of the New Testament. The thoughts of the one heart are as effectually reached by the word of God, which discerns and divides them asunder, as the thoughts of the other heart. And if, on the strength of these principles, we may go, by a single inch, beyond the outskirts of Christendom, on the very same principles is the whole extent of the habitable world laid open to the enterprises of Bible Societies and Christian Missionaries. There is not a human being who does not carry within him a mould of correspondence to that die which was wrought by the wisdom of God; and which is fitted to meet the case and the circumstances of all his children; and which, in fact, makes the evidence of the Bible as portable, as Bibles and teachers are portable, and which may, and therefore ought, to be carried round the globe; and should be made to traverse in every direction the wide domains of humanity, and be carried to every island and every district where men are to be found, and to cir-

culate in full throughout all the tribes of this world's population, and to leave not so much as one straggling remnant of the species unvisited, nor to stop short in this noble enterprise, till the word of the testimony has been proclaimed among all nations, and kindreds, and families.

And if it were not so—if there was no such evidence, as that for which we are contending, by what practical avenue could the faith of the Gospel be made to find an entrance and an establishment among the great mass of our *own* population? Take away from us the self-evidencing power of the Bible, and you lay an interdict on the Christianity of cottages, on the Christianity of workshops, on the Christianity of crowded and industrious establishments, on the Christianity of nearly all our cities, and all our parishes. That the hope which is in us may have the property of endurance, there must be a reason for the hope; and where, we ask, in the whole field of their habitual contemplations are the toil-worn children of poverty to find it? Are they to search for this reason among the archives of history? Are they to gather it out of the mouldering erudition of other days? Are they to fetch it up from the profound and the puzzling obscurities of argumentation? Are they to encounter the toils of scholarship, and ere the light of revelation can guide or can gladden them, think you that they must learn to number, and to balance, and to confront the testimonies of former generations? No! Refuse us the evidence we have been insisting on, and in doing so, you pass an obliterating spunge over nearly all the Christianity that is in our land.

It might still continue to be talked of in the cloistered retirements of literary debate and speculation. But the mighty host of our people could take no more rational interest in its questions, than they could in any controversy of the schools. And if the truth of this volume be not legibly stamped upon its own pages—if all the evidence by which we have affirmed it to be most thoroughly and most visibly impregnated be a delusion—if all the varied points of accordancy, between the book of revelation and the book of human experience, be not sufficient to attest the divinity which framed it—or if this attestation be beyond the understanding of an ordinary peasant—then must Christianity be ever shut up from the vast majority of our species: nor do we see one possible way of causing it to circulate at large among the families of our land.

But let us not be understood, by these remarks, to undervalue the power and the importance of the external evidences of our faith. Though it is to the subject matter of the testimony itself, that we would send the inquirer for the most satisfying conviction of the truth; yet we hold it of paramount importance to exhibit the strength of argument, and the irresistible force of evidence, which can be adduced for the authenticity and divine authority of Revelation, to silence the gainsayer, and to vindicate Christianity from the assaults of infidelity. And we know not a finer assemblage of evidence for the divine Record, to meet and to overthrow the sophistries and objections with which scepticism is ever assailing it, or to resolve the doubts and difficulties which may agitate the mind of the honest

inquirer, than the able and interesting Treatises of which the present Volume is composed. The writers display, in an uncommon degree, extensive knowledge and profound erudition; and they possess every talent and qualification which is essential to solid argument, legitimate reasoning, and sound induction. With a manly spirit, suited to the rectitude of their cause, and possessed of an *experimental* assurance of the truth which they advocate, their arguments are more characterized by heartfelt power than subtle ingenuity; and, with a feeling of confidence in the strength of their cause, they manifest that dignity which best comports with the sacredness and majesty of truth, by rearing the fabric of their own evidence, without descending to notice all the oft-refuted, yet still re-echoed sophistries and cavils of infidelity. The evidences they present, however, are so extensive and varied, that every order of mind is addressed with suitable proofs for its conviction; and though it would be impossible to advert to every trivial objection which infidelity has invented, or every cavil which impiety has urged, yet without fear or evasion, they have fairly selected, and triumphantly met those difficulties and objections, which infidelity has represented as most formidable to Christianity. Aware that there are infatuated men who reason against Christianity, as if it were pregnant with every mischief—who seem to delight in the imagination, that such an overwhelming calamity as a belief in its doctrines shall never overtake them—and who resist its pretensions with such inflexible obstinacy, as if the abrogation of Christianity would introduce a new order of blessing into our world,—the writers in the

present Volume not only introduce Christianity as presenting her credentials, but as stating and expounding her *beneficent* message. While deducing the legitimate internal evidences, arising from the nature, character, and design of Christianity, and its peculiar adaptation to renovate the moral condition of man, they intermingle their evidences with a luminous exhibition of the dispensation of grace—a dispensation so holy, perfect, and beneficent in its character and operation, that while it is well fitted to bless the life that now is, it furnishes the only solid and comfortable hope for eternity.

In Leslie's "Short and Easy Method with the Deists," and "The Truth of Christianity Demonstrated," we have the historical evidence for the truth of Scripture exhibited in a form so convincing and satisfactory, that the mind which can reject such evidence must evince a total perversity of reason, as well as an abjuration of all such testimony as can substantiate the truth of any bygone event in this world's history,—which would go to expose every authentic record to the charge of fabulousness, and reduce the best established facts into a state of doubt and uncertainty. The firm coherence of his argument, and the soundness of his marks for distinguishing between truth and falsehood, which he so legitimately applies for ascertaining the authenticity of the facts of Scripture history, render his statements so conclusive and irresistible, that no reply can be made to his demonstrations, which does not imply a dereliction of reason and principle which the bitterest enemy of Christianity would be ashamed to avow. His proofs possess that speciality of

character, that, even by the confession of infidelity itself, they can belong only to genuine records, and can never be found but in connection with events which, in truth and reality, had a positive existence. It must, therefore, be a daring and hardy scepticism indeed, which can elude or resist the force of those unequivocal proofs, by which the author indubitably establishes the authenticity of the facts which are recorded in Scripture.

Not less conclusive, in another department of evidence, do we hold Lord Lyttelton's "Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul." The soundness of his reasonings, established on the well-known principles of human nature, and the no less sound and philosophical deductions which he makes from the whole sentiments and conduct of the Apostle, render his arguments in favour of Christianity so clear and irresistible, that we think no honest mind can give his "Observations" an attentive and unprejudiced perusal, without arriving at a thorough and well-established conviction of the truth of Christianity. To reject such evidence, or to arrive at any other conclusion, would be to betray a most wilful perversity of mind, and to commit a most grievous outrage on the soundest principles and laws of human judgment. From the impossibility of accounting for such conduct by the ingenuity of imposture, it must be by a total inversion of all the motives and principles which are known to influence human conduct, that an opposite conclusion can be drawn to what our Author has deduced from an examination of the life and labours of St. Paul—that he was indeed a divinely-commissioned agent of heaven, and that

the Christian dispensation, which he laboured to establish, has indubitable claims to a divine original.

In Dr. Doddridge's Discourses on the "Evidences of Christianity," we have a full and comprehensive survey of all the variety of evidence which is generally adduced in support of the authenticity and divine authority of the New Testament. The Treatise is no less characterized by the clear and forcible argument which pervades it, than by the affectionate earnestness which it breathes, and the close and pathetic appeals which the excellent Author makes to the minds of his readers, on the pre-eminent importance of the truths of the divine record, and of the no less unspeakable danger of neglecting or contemning the gospel message.

The next Treatise, by Dr. Bates, on "The Divinity of the Christian Religion," contains a no less comprehensive, and still more powerful exhibition of the various evidences which can be adduced for establishing the truth of Christianity. The evidences from history, from prophecy, from miracles, from the testimony of credible witnesses, are all brought in distinct and convincing review before the mind; and our readers cannot peruse this admirable Treatise, without an increased feeling of confidence in the variety and fulness, and invincible character of that rich assemblage of evidence, on the immoveable basis of which Christianity is established. And while he satisfactorily establishes the truth of Christianity, he does not leave his readers in ignorance of what Christianity is. He not only presents the testimony which accompanies truth, to carry conviction to the understanding, but he presents the

truth itself, in such a form as is fitted to commend it to the conscience. And such is our feeling of confidence in the truth, for attesting its own divinity, that we hold the truth itself to possess a power of manifestation, which addresses the heart with a more prevailing and resistless energy, than either the power of demonstration can press, or the evidence of the most incontestable miracles can enforce.

Dr. Owen's Treatise "On the Divine Original, Authority, and Self-Evidencing Light and Power of the Holy Scriptures," embraces a distinct, but most important species of evidence; and this article will be held in high estimation by those who desiderate a satisfactory conviction of the claims of the Bible to divine inspiration, of which he adduces the most solid and indubitable proofs; and he affords a no less clear and satisfactory explanation to those who possess no distinct apprehension of the manner in which the word came forth from God, and was again given out by those inspired men to whom it was communicated, as well as the security and infallible certainty that what they gave out as the mind and will of God was indeed of divine original, and a divine communication. On this firm and immoveable basis he establishes the authority of the Scriptures, their claim to a supremacy over the mind and will of those to whom this revelation has come, and the fearful danger of a neglect or a rejection of the message. And the truths which are made to evolve, in the progress of his demonstration, bear a hard and humbling aspect to that proud philosophy which cherishes a feeling of sentimental adoration of the works of nature, which are but the subordinate reflectors of the glory

of the Deity, while it turns with antipathy and disgust from that word which the Deity has magnified above all his works, as giving a fuller and more glorious manifestation of his mind and character—a manifestation of the Deity so surpassing and exalted above that which is exhibited in the visible creation, that, in comparison with the light, and power, and extent of that manifestation which is given out in the Bible, it may well be said to have no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth. And while we award our meed of praise to the writers of the previous Treatises in this Volume, who have reared such a collective body of evidence to meet and overthrow the no less impotent than impious assaults of infidelity, yet do we hold Dr. Owen to have rendered a more essential service to the cause of Divine Revelation, when, by his clear and irresistible demonstrations, he has proved that the written word itself possesses a self-evidencing light and power for manifesting its own divine original, superior to the testimony of eye-witnesses, or the evidence of miracles, or those supernatural gifts with which the first teachers of Christianity were endowed for accrediting their divine mission. And well may the profane or the infidel contemners of revealed truth tremble at their presumption, when they are told not only of the superiority of the word of God in its power of manifestation above all his works, but of the light and power which the written word possesses to attest its own divinity, above all that external evidence which infidel philosophers so much desiderate for establishing the truth of divine revelation.

The Treatise of Richard Baxter " On the Folly

and Danger of making Light of Christ" closes the Volume; and though it does not partake of the character of direct evidence, yet we hold it to be of prime importance to the cause of Christian truth, as it detects and exposes the latent causes of infidelity in the worldliness, or love of pleasure, or the diversified pursuits which engross the mind, to the utter exclusion of the salvation which the Gospel reveals. And truly does he resolve the largest portion of the infidelity which exists, into the infidelity of the heart, and not of the understanding. From the irreconcilable characters of God and Mammon, of Christ and Belial, of the love of the Father, and the love of the world, those infatuated men who are determined to render their homage to the one, must necessarily entertain feelings of hostility to the other; and this hostility of the affections exerts a secret but blinding and delusive influence over the judgment, and in spite of the clearest and most incontrovertible evidence, betraying it into a disbelief of what the depraved heart must wish were not true. Aware as we are, of the extreme reluctance with which men whose minds have become poisoned with the pride of infidelity, or whose hearts have become depraved with the love of sin, admit any argument in favour of Christianity, we could not close our Volume without bringing the forcible and pathetic appeals of Richard Baxter to bear upon their consciences. And if there be one piece in this Volume, which, in preference to another, we would more urgently recommend to their serious regard, it would be this invaluable Treatise of Richard Baxter. Aware as he was of that deep and desperate infa-

tuation by which so many are deceived to their eternal undoing, with the tenderness and pathos of a man whose heart glowed with angelic benevolence—and with the earnestness and urgency of a man who felt the importance of his message; does he endeavour to persuade men by all that is commanding in the authority of God—by all that is winning in the love of Christ—by all that is inviting in a blessed immortality—and by all that is tremendous in eternal perdition, to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold of the offered remedy. And if such men continue in their wilful and obstinate rejection of the Gospel, and heedlessly neglect, or perversely resist, the mercy which it offers, then it is not from want of clear and incontrovertible evidence, but from a desperately wicked and deceitful heart which is deceiving them to their ruin; and we know not by what power, or by what sophistry such infatuated men can turn away from them the force of this fearful declaration, That "if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: *in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not*, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

It is well that Christianity has such a firm basis of argumentation to rest upon. It is well that she can be triumphantly borne throughout the whole range of human literature, and can bear to be confronted with all that the fancy or the philosophy of man have ever devised against her reputation. We count every one illustration of her external evidence to be an accession to her cause, nor can we look at the defensive barrier which has been

thrown around her, without wishing that the public eye might often be directed to the strength and the glory of her venerable outworks. But let it not be disguised. The surrender of the understanding to the external argument is one thing; the rational principle of Christianity is another. And, therefore, there must be something more than the bare evidence of Christianity, to work the faith which is unto salvation. Many are the accomplished philosophers who have rejected this evidence, and to them it will stand in place of the miracle of tongues to the unbelievers of old. It will be a sign to justify their condemnation. But many also have admitted the evidence, and still the opinion has been as unfruitful of all that is religious, as the conclusion they have come to on any literary question. And, men of genius and accomplishment as they are, they must, to obtain the faith of the Gospel, just put themselves on a level with the most untaught of our peasantry. They must submit to be tutored by the same evidence at last. They must labour after the same manifestation of the truth unto their consciences. They must open their Bibles, and give earnest heed unto the word of this prophecy. To the spirit of earnestness they must add the spirit of prayer. They must knock for light at the door which they cannot open, till the day dawns and the day-star arise in their hearts—and then will they find, that, by a way hidden from the wise and the prudent, but revealed unto babes, the word of prophecy may become more sure than any miracle can make it—more sure, than if a voice of attestation were to sound forth upon them from the canopy of heaven—and greatly more

sure than by all that traditionary evidence, which links the present with the past, the period in which we now live with that wondrous period, when such a voice was heard by human ears on the mount of transfiguration.

It is true that the word of the testimony is often perused in vain—that in the reading of the Scriptures, the veil which is upon the heart of the natural man often remains untaken away—and that, after all that is done with him, he persists in blind and wilful obstinacy, and will neither see the doctrine of the Bible, nor the reflection of that doctrine upon his own character. To work this effect, the word must be accompanied by the demonstration of the Spirit, and who shall limit his operations? When we think of the influences of Him who is promised in answer to prayer, and when we farther think of the extent of warrant that we have for prayer, even that we should ask for all such things as are agreeable to the will of God, who willeth all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, and who is ever ready to put a blessing on His own word; then, to the diligent reading of the word, let him add the humble, earnest, and sincere prayer, that "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, may shine into his heart, to give him the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as it is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ."

T. C.

Edinburgh, *April*, 1829.

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A

SHORT AND EASY METHOD

WITH

THE DEISTS:

AND THE

TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY

DEMONSTRATED,

IN A

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A CHRISTIAN AND A DEIST.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES LESLIE, A. M.

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

A

SHORT AND EASY METHOD

WITH

THE DEISTS.

Sir,

I. In answer to yours of the third instant, I much condole with your unhappy circumstances, of being placed amongst such company, where, as you say, you continually hear the sacred Scriptures, and the histories therein contained, particularly of Moses and of Christ, and all revealed religion, turned into ridicule, by men who set up for sense and reason. And they say that there is no greater ground to believe in Christ than in Mahomet; that all these pretences to revelation are cheats, and ever have been, among Pagans, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians; that they are all alike impositions of cunning and designing men, upon the credulity, at first, of simple and unthinking people, till, their numbers increasing, their delusions grew popular, came at last to be established by laws; and then the force of education and custom gives a bias to the judgments of after ages, till such conceits come really to be believed, being received upon trust from the ages

foregoing, without examining into the original and bottom of them. Which these our modern men of sense (as they desire to be esteemed,) say that they only do; that they only have their judgments freed from the slavish authority of precedents and laws, in matters of truth, which, they say, ought only to be decided by reason; though, by a prudent compliance with popularity and laws, they preserve themselves from outrage, and legal penalties; for none of their complexion are addicted to sufferings or martyrdom.

Now, Sir, that which you desire from me, is some short topic of reason, if such can be found, whereby, without running to authorities, and the intricate mazes of learning, which produce long disputes, and which these men of reason deny by wholesale, though they can give no reason for it, only suppose that authors have been trumped upon us, interpolated and corrupted, so that no stress can be laid upon them, though it cannot be shown wherein they are so corrupted; which, in reason, ought to lie upon them to prove who allege it; otherwise it is not only a precarious, but a guilty plea: and the more, that they refrain not to quote books on their side, for whose authority there are no better, or not so good grounds. However, you say, it makes your disputes endless, and they go away with noise and clamour, and a boast, that there is nothing, at least nothing certain, to be said on the Christian side. Therefore you are desirous to find some one topic of reason, which should demonstrate the truth of the Christian religion, and at the same time distinguish it from the impostures of Mahomet, and the old Pagan world; that our Deists may be brought

to this test, and be obliged either to renounce their reason, and the common reason of mankind, or to submit to the clear proof, from reason, of the Christian religion; which must be such a proof, as no imposture can pretend to, otherwise it cannot prove the Christian religion not to be an imposture. And, whether such a proof, one single proof, (to avoid confusion,) is not to be found out, you desire to know from me.

And you say, that you cannot imagine but there must be such a proof, because every truth is in itself clear, and one; and therefore that one reason for it, if it be the true reason, must be sufficient; and if sufficient, it is better than many; for multiplicity confounds, especially to weak judgments.

Sir, you have imposed a hard task upon me: I wish I could perform it. For though every truth is one, yet our sight is so feeble, that we cannot always come to it directly, but by many inferences, and laying of things together.

But I think, that, in the case before us, there is such a proof as you require, and I will set it down as short and plain as I can.

II. *First*, then, I suppose, that the truth of the doctrine of Christ will be sufficiently evinced, if the matters of fact, which are recorded of him in the gospels, be true; for his miracles, if true, do vouch the truth of what he delivered.

The same is to be said as to Moses. If he brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea in that miraculous manner which is related in Exodus, and did such other wonderful things as are there told of him, it must necessarily follow that he was sent

from God: these being the strongest proofs we can desire, and which every Deist will confess he would acquiesce in, if he saw them with his eyes. Therefore the stress of this cause will depend upon the proof of these matters of fact.

1. And the method I will take, is, first, to lay down such rules, as to the truth of matters of fact in general, that where they all meet, such matters of fact cannot be false. And then, secondly, to show that all these rules do meet in the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; and that they do not meet in the matters of fact of Mahomet, and the heathen deities, or can possibly meet in any imposture whatsoever.

2. The rules are these: 1. That the matters of fact be such, as that men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may be judges of it. 2. That it be done publicly in the face of the world. 3. That not only public monuments be kept up in memory of it, but some outward actions be performed. 4. That such monuments, and such actions or observances, be instituted, and do commence from the time that the matter of fact was done.

3. The two first rules make it impossible for any such matter of fact to be imposed upon men, at the time when such matter of fact was said to be done, because every man's eyes and senses would contradict it. For example: Suppose any man should pretend, that yesterday he divided the Thames, in presence of all the people of London, and carried the whole city, men, women, and children, over to Southwark, on dry land, the waters standing like walls on both sides: I say, it is morally impossible

that he could persuade the people of London that this was true, when every man, woman, and child could contradict him, and say, that this was a notorious falsehood, for that they had not seen the Thames so divided, or had gone over on dry land. Therefore I take it for granted, (and, I suppose, with the allowance of all the Deists in the world,) that no such imposition could be put upon men, at the time when such public matter of fact was said to be done.

4. Therefore it only remains that such matter of fact might be invented some time after, when the men of that generation, wherein the thing was said to be done, are all past and gone; and the credulity of after ages might be imposed upon, to believe that things were done in former ages which were not.

And for this, the two last rules secure us as much as the two first rules in the former case; for, whenever such a matter of fact came to be invented, if not only monuments were said to remain of it, but likewise that public actions and observances were constantly used ever since the matter of fact was said to be done, the deceit must be detected, by no such monuments appearing, and by the experience of every man, woman, and child, who must know that no such actions or observances were ever used by them. For example: Suppose I should now invent a story of such a thing done a thousand years ago, I might perhaps get some to believe it; but if I say, that not only such a thing was done, but that, from that day to this, every man, at the age of twelve years, had a joint of his little finger cut off, and that every man in the nation did want a joint of such a finger; and that this institution was said to be part

of the matter of fact done so many years ago, and vouched as a proof and confirmation of it, and as having descended, without interruption, and been constantly practised, in memory of such matter of fact, all along, from the time that such matter of fact was done: I say, it is impossible I should be believed in such a case, because every one could contradict me, as to the mark of cutting off a joint of the finger; and that being part of my original matter of fact, must demonstrate the whole to be false.

III. Let us now come to the second point, to show that the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ have all these rules or marks before-mentioned; and that neither the matters of fact of Mahomet, or what is reported of the heathen deities, have the like: and that no impostor can have them all.

1. As to Moses, I suppose it will be allowed me, that he could not have persuaded six hundred thousand men that he had brought them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea; fed them forty years, without bread, by miraculous manna, and the other matters of fact recorded in his books, if they had not been true; because every man's senses that were then alive, must have contradicted it. And therefore, he must have imposed upon all their senses, if he could have made them believe it, when it was false and no such things done. So that here are the first and second of the above-mentioned four marks.

From the same reason, it was equally impossible for him to have made them receive his five books as truth, and not to have rejected them as a manifest imposture; which told of all these things as done before their eyes, if they had not been so done.

See how positively he speaks to them, Deut. xi. 2. to ver. 8. "And know ye this day: for I speak not with your children which have not known, and which have not seen the chastisement of the Lord your God, his greatness, his mighty hand, and his stretched-out arm, and his miracles, and his acts, which he did in the midst of Egypt, unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; and what he did unto the army of Egypt, unto their horses, and to their chariots: how he made the water of the Red Sea to overflow them as they pursued after you, and how the Lord hath destroyed them unto this day; and what he did unto you in the wilderness, until ye came into this place; and what he did unto Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben; how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the substance that was in their possession, in the midst of all Israel. But your eyes have seen all the great acts of the Lord, which he did," &c.

From hence we must suppose it impossible that these books of Moses (if an imposture) could have been invented and put upon the people who were then alive, when all these things were said to be done.

The utmost, therefore, that even a supposition can stretch to, is, that these books were written in some age after Moses, and put out in his name.

And to this I say, that if it was so, it was impossible that those books should have been received as the books of Moses, in that age wherein they may have been supposed to have been first invented.

Why? Because they speak of themselves as delivered by Moses, and kept in the ark from his time. "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." Deut. xxxi. 24—26. And there was a copy of this book to be left likewise with the king. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes, to do them." Deut. xvii. 18, 19.

Here, then, you see that this book of the law speaks of itself, not only as a history or relation of what things were then done, but as the standing and municipal law and statutes of the nation of the Jews, binding the king as well as the people.

Now, in whatever age after Moses you will suppose this book to have been forged, it was impossible it could be received as truth; because it was not then to be found, either in the ark, or with the king, or any where else: for when first invented, every body must know, that they had never heard of it before.

And therefore, they could less believe it to be the book of their statutes, and the standing law of the

land, which they had all along received, and by which they had been governed.

Could any man, now, at this day, invent a book of statutes or acts of parliament for England, and make it pass upon the nation as the only book of statutes that ever they had known? As impossible was it for the books of Moses (if they were invented in any age after Moses) to have been received for what they declare themselves to be, namely, the statutes and municipal law of the nation of the Jews; and to have persuaded the Jews, that they had owned and acknowledged these books, all along from the days of Moses, to that day in which they were first invented; that is, that they had owned them before they had ever so much as heard of them. Nay, more, the whole nation must, in an instant, forget their former laws and government, if they could receive these books as being their former laws. And they could not otherwise receive them, because they vouched themselves so to be. Let me ask the Deists but one short question. Was there ever a book of sham laws, which were not the laws of the nation, palmed upon any people since the world began? If not, with what face can they say this of the book of laws of the Jews? Why will they say that of them, which they confess impossible in any nation, or among any people?

But they must yet be more unreasonable. For the books of Moses have a further demonstration of their truth than even other law-books have: for they not only contain the laws, but give an historical account of their institution, and the practice of them from that time: as of the passover, in memory of

the death of the first-born in Egypt: and that the same day, all the first-born of Israel, both of man and beast, were, by a perpetual law, dedicated to God, and the Levites taken for all the first-born of the children of Israel. That Aaron's rod which budded, was kept in the ark, in memory of the rebellion and wonderful destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and for the confirmation of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. As likewise the pot of manna, in memory of their having been fed with it forty years in the wilderness. That the brazen serpent was kept (which remained to the days of Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 4.) in memory of that wonderful deliverance, by only looking upon it, from the biting of the fiery serpents. The feast of Pentecost, in memory of the dreadful appearance of God upon Mount Horeb, &c.

And besides these remembrances of particular actions and occurrences, there were other solemn institutions in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt, in the general, which included all the particulars. As of the Sabbath. Their daily sacrifices, and yearly expiation; their new moons, and several feasts and fasts. So that there were yearly, monthly, weekly, daily remembrances and recognitions of these things.

And not only so, but the books of the same Moses tell us, that a particular tribe (of Levi) was appointed and consecrated by God, as his priests; by whose hands, and none other, the sacrifices of the people were to be offered, and these solemn institutions to be celebrated. That it was death for any other to approach the altar. That their high-priest wore a

glorious mitre, and magnificent robes of God's own contrivance, with the miraculous Urim and Thummim in his breast-plate, whence the divine responses were given. That at his word, the king and all the people were to go out and to come in. That these Levites were likewise the chief judges even in all civil causes, and that it was death to resist their sentence. Now, whenever it can be supposed that these books of Moses were forged in some ages after Moses, it is impossible they could have been received as true, unless the forgers could have made the whole nation believe, that they had received these books from their fathers, had been instructed in them when they were children, and had taught them to their children; moreover, that they had all been circumcised, and did circumcise their children, in pursuance to what was commanded in these books: that they had observed the yearly passover, the weekly sabbath, the new moons, and all these several feasts, fasts, and ceremonies commanded in these books: that they had never eaten any swine's flesh, or other meats prohibited in these books: that they had a magnificent tabernacle, with a visible priesthood to administer in it, which was confined to the tribe of Levi; over whom was placed a glorious high-priest, clothed with great and mighty prerogatives: whose death only could deliver those that had fled to the cities of refuge. And that these priests were their ordinary judges, even in civil matters: I say, was it possible to have persuaded a whole nation of men, that they had known and practised all these things, if they had not done it? or, secondly, to have received a book for truth,

which said they had practised them, and appealed to that practice? So that here are the third and fourth of the marks above-mentioned.

But now let us descend to the utmost degree of supposition, namely, that these things were practised before these books of Moses were forged; and that those books did only impose upon the nation, in making them believe, that they had kept these observances in memory of such and such things as were inserted in those books.

Well then, let us proceed upon this supposition, (however groundless,) and now, will not the same impossibilities occur as in the former case? For, first, this must suppose that the Jews kept all these observances in memory of nothing, or without knowing any thing of their original, or the reason why they kept them. Whereas these very observances did express the ground and reason of their being kept, as the Passover, in memory of God's passing over the children of the Israelites, in that night wherein he slew all the first-born of Egypt; and so of the rest.

But, secondly, let us suppose, contrary both to reason and matter of fact, that the Jews did not know any reason at all why they kept these observances: yet, was it possible to put it upon them, that they had kept these observances in memory of what they had never heard of before that day, whensoever you will suppose that these books of Moses were first formed? For example, suppose I should now forge some romantic story, of strange things done a thousand years ago; and, in confirmation of this, should endeavour to persuade the Christian world,

that they had all along, from that day to this, kept the first day of the week in memory of such a hero, an Apollonius, a Barcosbas, or a Mahomet; and had all been baptized in his name; and swore by his name, and upon that very book, (which I had then forged, and which they never saw before) in their public judicatures, that this book was their gospel and law, which they had ever since that time, these thousand years past, universally received and owned, and none other. I would ask any Deist, whether he thinks it possible that such a cheat could pass, or such a legend be received as the gospel of Christians; and that they could be made believe that they never had any other gospel? The same reason is as to the books of Moses; and must be, as to every matter of fact, which has all the four marks beforementioned; and these marks secure any such matter of fact as much from being invented and imposed in any after-ages, as at the time when such matters of fact were said to be done.

Let me give one very familiar example more in this case. There is the Stonehenge in Salisbury Plain, every body knows it, and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what.

Now, suppose I should write a book to-morrow, and tell there, that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions. And, for a further confirmation of this, should say in this book, that it was written at the time when such actions were done, and by the very actors themselves, or eye-witnesses. And that this book had been received as truth, and

quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since. Moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children, and that we did teach it to our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children. I ask any Deist, whether he thinks this could pass upon England? And whether, if I or any other should insist upon it, we should not, instead of being believed, be sent to Bedlam?

Now let us compare this with the Stonehenge, as I may call it, or twelve great stones set up at Gilgal, which is told in the fourth chapter of Joshua. There it is said, verse 6. that the reason why they were set up, was, that when their children, in after-ages, should ask the meaning of it, it should be told them.

And the thing in memory of which they were set up, was such as could not possibly be imposed upon that nation; at that time when it was said to be done, it was as wonderful and miraculous as their passage through the Red Sea. And withal, free from a very poor objection, which the Deists have advanced against that miracle of the Red Sea: thinking to solve it by a spring-tide, with the concurrence of a strong wind, happening at the same time; which left the sand so dry, as that the Israelites, being all foot, might pass through the oozy places and holes, which it must be supposed the sea left behind it; but that the Egyptians, being all horse and chariots, stuck in those holes, and were entangled, so as that they could not march so fast as the Israelites: and that this was all the meaning of its being said, that God

took off their (the Egyptians') chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily. So that they would make nothing extraordinary, at least nothing miraculous, in all this action.

This is advanced in Le Clerc's Dissertations upon Genesis, lately printed in Holland, and that part, with others of the like tendency, endeavouring to resolve other miracles, as that of Sodom and Gomorrah, &c. into the mere natural causes, are put into English by the well-known T. Brown, for the edification of the Deists in England. But these gentlemen have forgot, that the Israelites had great herds of many thousand cattle with them; which would be apter to stray, and fall into those holes and oozy places in the strand, than horses with riders, who might direct them.

But such precarious and silly suppositions are not worth the answering. If there had been no more in this passage through the Red Sea than that of a spring-tide, &c. it had been impossible for Moses to have made the Israelites believe that relation given of it in Exodus, with so many particulars, which themselves saw to be true. And all those Scriptures which magnify this action, and appeal to it as a full demonstration of the miraculous power of God, must be reputed as romance or legend.

I say this for the sake of some Christians, who think it no prejudice to the truth of the Holy Bible, but rather an advantage, as rendering it more easy to be believed, if they can solve whatever seems miraculous in it, by the power of second causes; and so to make all, as they speak, natural and easy. Wherein, if they could prevail, the natural and easy

result would be, not to believe one word in all those sacred oracles. For if things be not as they are told in any relation, that relation must be false; and if false in part, we cannot trust to it, either in whole or in part.

Here are to be excepted mis-translations and errors, either in copy or in press. But where there is no room for supposing these, as where all copies do agree, there we must either receive all, or reject all. I mean, in any book that pretends to be written from the mouth of God. For in other common histories, we may believe part and reject part, as we see cause.

But to return. The passage of the Israelites over Jordan, in memory of which those stones at Gilgal were set up, is free from all those little carpings before-mentioned, that are made as to the passage through the Red Sea. For notice was given to the Israelites the day before, of this great miracle to be done, Josh. iii. 5. It was done at noon-day, before the whole nation. And when the waters of Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when that river overflowed all his banks, ver. 15. And it was done, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds must take to do it; but all on a sudden, as soon as the "feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, then the waters, which came down from above, stood and rose up upon an heap, very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. The priests stood in the midst of

Jordan, till all the armies of Israel had passed over. —And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped on Gilgal, on the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over: as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over; that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty; that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever." Chap. iv. from ver. 18. to end.

If the passage over the Red Sea, had been only taking advantage of a spring-tide, or the like, how would this teach all the people of the earth, that the hand of the Lord was mighty? How would a thing no more remarkable have been taken notice of through all the world? How would it have taught Israel to fear the Lord, when they must know, that notwithstanding of all these big words, there was so little in it? How could they have believed, or received a book, as truth, which, they knew told the matter so far otherwise from what it was?

But, as I said, this passage over Jordan, which is here compared to that of the Red Sea, is free from all those cavils that are made as to that of the Red Sea, and is a further attestation to it, being said to be done in the same manner as was that of the Red Sea.

Now, to form our argument, let us suppose that there never was any such thing as that passage over Jordan. That these stones at Gilgal were set up upon some other occasion, in some after age. And then, that some designing man invented this book of Joshua, and said that it was written by Joshua at that time; and gave this stonage at Gilgal for a testimony of the truth of it. Would not every body say to him, 'We know the stonage at Gilgal, but we never heard before of this reason for it! Nor of this book of Joshua! Where has it been all this while? And where, and how came you, after so many ages, to find it? Besides, this book tells us, that this passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age; and, therefore, that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal, as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it when we were children; nor did ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not likely that could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage did continue, which was set up for that and no other end!'

And if, for the reasons before given, no such imposition could be put upon us as to the stonage in Salisbury Plain; how much less could it be to the stonage at Gilgal!

And if, where we know not the reason of a bare

naked monument, such a sham reason cannot be imposed, how much more is it impossible to impose upon us in actions and observances, which we celebrate in memory of particular passages! How impossible to make us forget those passages which we daily commemorate: and persuade us, that we had always kept such institutions in memory of what we never heard of before; that is, we knew it, before we knew it!

And if we find it thus impossible for an imposition to be put upon us, even in some things which have not all the four marks before-mentioned; how much more impossible is it, that any deceit should be in that thing where all the four marks do meet!

This has been showed, in the first place, as to the matters of fact of Moses.

2. Therefore I come now (secondly) to show, that as in the matters of Moses, so likewise all these four marks do meet in the matters of fact, which are recorded in the gospel of our blessed Saviour. And my work herein will be the shorter, because all that is said before of Moses and his books, is every way as applicable to Christ and his Gospel. His works and his miracles are there said to be done publicly in the face of the world, as he argued to his accusers, "I spake openly to the world, and in secret have I said nothing." It is told, Acts ii. 41. that three thousand at one time, and Acts iv. 4. that about five thousand at another time, were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen, what had been done publicly before their eyes, wherein it was impossible to have imposed upon them. Therefore, here were the two first of the rules before-mentioned.

Then for the two second: Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things; and they were not instituted in after-ages, but at the very time when these things were said to be done; and have been observed, without interruption, in all ages, through the whole Christian world, down all the way from that time to this. And Christ himself did ordain apostles and other ministers of his gospel, to preach and administer the sacraments, and to govern his church; and that always, even unto the end of the world. Accordingly they have continued by regular succession, to this day: and, no doubt, ever shall, while the earth shall last. So that the Christian clergy are as notorious a matter of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. And the gospel is as much a law to the Christians, as the book of Moses to the Jews: and it being part of the matters of fact related in the gospel, that such an order of men were appointed by Christ, and to continue to the end of the world; consequently, if the gospel was a fiction, and invented (as it must be) in some ages after Christ; then, at that time, when it was first invented, there could be no such order of clergy, as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; which must give the lie to the gospel, and demonstrate the whole to be false. And the matters of fact of Christ being pressed to be true, no otherwise than as there was at that time, (whenever the Deists will suppose the gospel to be forged,) not only public sacraments of Christ's institution, but an order of clergy, likewise of his appointment to administer them; and it being impossible there could be any such things before they

were invented, it is as impossible that they should be received when invented. And, therefore, by what was said above, it was as impossible to have imposed upon mankind in this matter, by inventing it in after-ages, as at the time when those things were said to be done.

3. The matters of fact of Mahomet, or what is fabled of the deities, do all want some of the aforesaid four rules, whereby the certainty of matters of fact is demonstrated. First, for Mahomet, he pretended to no miracles, as he tells us in his Koran, c. 6. &c. and those which are commonly told of him pass among the Mahometans themselves but as legendary fables; and, as such, are rejected by the wise and learned among them; as the legends of their saints are in the church of Rome. See Dr. Prideaux's Life of Mahomet, p. 34.

But, in the next place, those which are told of him, do all want the two first rules before-mentioned. For his pretended converse with the moon: his mersa, or night-journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven, &c. were not performed before any body. We have only his own word for them. And they are as groundless as the delusions of the Fox or Muggleton among ourselves. The same is to be said (in the second place) of the fables of the heathen gods, of Mercury's stealing sheep, Jupiter's turning himself into a bull, and the like; besides the folly and unworthiness of such senseless, pretended miracles. And, moreover, the wise among the heathen did reckon no otherwise of these but as fables, which had a mythology or mystical meaning in them, of which several of them have given us

the *rationale* or explication. And it is plain enough that Ovid meant no other by all his Metamorphoses.

It is true, the heathen deities had their priests; they had likewise feasts, games, and other public institutions in memory of them. But all these want the fourth mark, viz. that such priesthood and institutions should commence from the time that such things as they commemorate were said to be done; otherwise they cannot secure after-ages from the imposture, by detecting it at the time when first invented, as hath been argued before. But the Bacchanalia, and other heathen feasts, were instituted many ages after what was reported of these gods was said to be done, and therefore can be no proof. And the priests of Bacchus, Apollo, &c. were not ordained by these supposed gods: but were appointed by others, in after-ages, only in honour to them. And, therefore, these orders of priests are no evidence to the matter of fact which are reported of their gods.

IV. Now to apply what has been said. You may challenge all the Deists in the world to show any action that is fabulous, which has all the four rules or marks before-mentioned. No, it is impossible. And (to resume a little what is spoken to before) the histories of Exodus and the Gospel never could have been received, if they had not been true; because the institution of the priesthood of Levi, and of Christ; of the Sabbath, the Passover, of Circumcision, of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, &c. are there related, as descending all the way down from those times, without interruption. And it is full as

impossible to persuade men that they had been circumcised or baptised, had circumcised or baptised their children, celebrated Passovers, Sabbaths, Sacraments, &c. under the government and administration of a certain order of priests, if they had done none of these things, as to make them believe that they had gone through seas upon dry land, seen the dead raised, &c. And, without believing these, it was impossible that either the law or the gospel could have been received.

And the truth of the matters of fact of Exodus and the Gospel, being no otherwise pressed upon men than as they have practised such public institutions, it is appealing to the senses of mankind for the truth of them; and makes it impossible for any to have invented such stories in after-ages, without a palpable detection of the cheat when first invented; as impossible as to have imposed upon the senses of mankind, at the time when such public matters of fact were said to be done.

V. I do not say, that every thing which wants these four marks is false; but, that nothing can be false, which has them all.

I have no manner of doubt that there was such a man as Julius Cesar, that he fought at Pharsalia, was killed in the senate-house, and many other matters of fact of ancient times, though we keep no public observances in memory of them. But this shows that the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, have come to us better guarded than any other matters of fact, how true soever. And yet our Deists, who would laugh any man out of the world as an irrational brute, that should offer to deny

Cesar or Alexander, Homer or Virgil, their public works and actions, do, at the same time, value themselves as the only men of wit and sense, of free, generous, and unbiassed judgments, for ridiculing the histories of Moses and Christ, that are infinitely better attested, and guarded with infallible marks which the others want!

VI. Besides, that the importance of the subject would oblige all men to inquire more narrowly into the one than the other; for what consequence is it to me, or to the world, whether there was such a man as Cesar, whether he beat, or was beaten at Pharsalia, whether Homer or Virgil wrote such books, and, whether what is related in the Iliads or Æneids be true or false? It is not two-pence up or down to any man in the world. And, therefore, it is worth no man's while to inquire into it, either to oppose or justify the truth of these relations.

But our very souls and bodies, both this life and eternity, are concerned in the truth of what is related in the Holy Scriptures; and, therefore, men would be more inquisitive to search into the truth of these, than of any other matters of fact; examine and sift them narrowly, and find out the deceit, if any such could be found; for it concerned them nearly, and was of the last importance to them.

How unreasonable, then, is it to reject these matters of fact, so sifted, so examined, and so attested, as no other matters of fact in the world ever were; and yet, to think it the most highly unreasonable, even to madness, to deny other matters of fact, which have not the thousandth part of their evidence, and are of no consequence at all to us, whether true or false!

VII. There are several other topics, from whence the truth of the Christian religion is evinced to all who will judge by reason, and give themselves leave to consider. As the improbability that ten or twelve poor illiterate fishermen should form a design of converting the whole world to believe their delusions; and the impossibility of their effecting it, without force of arms, learning, oratory, or any one visible thing that could recommend them! And to impose a doctrine quite opposite to the lusts and pleasures of men, and all worldly advantages or enjoyments! And this in an age of so great learning and sagacity as that wherein the gospel was first preached! That these apostles should not only undergo all the scorn and contempt, but the severest persecutions, and most cruel deaths, that could be inflicted, in attestation to what themselves knew to be a mere deceit and forgery of their own contriving! Some have suffered for errors which they thought to be truth, but never any for what themselves knew to be lies. And the apostles must know what they taught to be lies, if it was so, because they spoke of those things which, they said, they had both "seen and heard, had looked upon and handled with their hands," &c.

Neither can it be, that they, perhaps, might have proposed some temporal advantages to themselves, but missed them, and met with sufferings instead of them; for, if it had been so, it is more than probable, that when they saw their disappointment, they would have discovered their conspiracy; especially when they might not have only saved their lives, but got great rewards for doing of it. That not

one of them should ever have been brought to do this.

But this is not all; for they tell us that their Master bade them expect nothing but sufferings in this world. This is the tenure of that gospel which they taught; and they told the same to all whom they converted. So that here was no disappointment.

For all that were converted by them, were converted upon the certain expectation of sufferings, and bidden prepare for it. Christ commanded his disciples to take up their cross daily, and follow him; and told them, that in the world they should have tribulation; that whoever did not forsake father, mother, wife, children, lands, and their very lives, could not be his disciples; that he who sought to save his life in this world, should lose it in the next.

Now, that this despised doctrine of the cross should prevail so universally against the allurements of flesh and blood, and all the blandishments of this world; against the rage and persecution of all the kings and powers of the earth; must show its original to be divine and its protector almighty. What is it else could conquer without arms, persuade without rhetoric, overcome enemies, disarm tyrants, and subdue empires without opposition?

VIII. We may add to all this, the testimonies of the most bitter enemies and persecutors of Christianity, both Jews and Gentiles, to the truth of the matter of fact of Christ, such as Josephus and Tacitus; of which the first flourished about forty years after the death of Christ, and the other about seventy

years after: so that they were capable of examining into the truth, and wanted not prejudice and malice sufficient to have inclined them to deny the matter of fact itself of Christ; but their confessing to it, as likewise Lucian, Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian the apostate; the Mahometans since, and all other enemies of Christianity that have arisen in the world, is an undeniable attestation to the truth of the matter of fact.

IX. But there is another argument more strong and convincing than even this matter of fact; more than the certainty of what I see with my eyes; and which the Apostle Peter calls a more sure word, that is, proof, than what he saw and heard upon the Holy Mount, when our blessed Saviour was transfigured before him and two other of the apostles: for, having repeated that passage as a proof of that whereof they were eye-witnesses, and heard the voice from heaven giving attestation to our Lord Christ, 2 Pet. i. 16, 17, 18. he says, ver. 19. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy," for the proof of this Jesus being the Messiah; that is, the prophecies which had gone before of him from the beginning of the world, and all exactly fulfilled in him.

Men may dispute an imposition or delusion upon our outward senses. But how that can be false, which has been so long, even from the beginning of the world, and so often, by all the prophets in several ages, foretold; how can this be an imposition or a forgery?

This is particularly insisted on in the method with the Jews. And even the Deists must confess, that that book we call the Old Testament, was in

being in the hands of the Jews long before our Saviour came into the world. And if they will be at the pains to compare the prophecies that are there of the Messiah, with the fulfilling of them, as to time, place, and all other circumstances in the person, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our blessed Saviour, will find this proof, what our Apostle here calls it, "a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Which God grant. Here is no possibility of deceit or imposture.

Old prophecies (and all so agreeing) could not have been contrived to countenance a new cheat; and nothing could be a cheat, that could fulfil all these.

For this, therefore, I refer the Deists to the method with the Jews.

I desire them likewise to look there, sect. xi. and consider the prophecies given so long ago, of which they see the fulfilling at this day with their own eyes, of the state of the Jews for many ages past and at present: without a king, or priest, or temple, or sacrifice, scattered to the four winds, sifted as with a sieve, among all nations; yet preserved, and always so to be, a distinct people from all others of the whole earth. Whereas those mighty monarchies which oppressed the Jews, and which commanded the world in their turns, and had the greatest human prospect of perpetuity, were to be extinguished, as they have been, even that their names should be blotted out from under heaven.

As likewise, that as remarkable of our blessed Saviour, concerning the preservation and progress of

the Christian church, when in her swaddling-clothes, consisting only of a few poor fishermen. Not by the sword, as that of Mahomet, but under all the persecution of men and hell; which yet should not prevail against her.

But though I offer these, as not to be slighted by the Deists, to which they can show nothing equal in all profane history, and in which it is impossible any cheat can lie; yet I put them not upon the same footing as the prophecies before-mentioned of the marks and coming of the Messiah, which have been since the world began. And that general expectation of the whole earth, at the time of his coming, insisted upon in the method with the Jews, sect. v. is greatly to be noticed.

But, I say, the foregoing prophecies of our Saviour are so strong a proof, as even miracles would not be sufficient to break their authority. I mean, if it were possible that a true miracle could be brought in contradiction to them: for that would be for God to contradict himself. But no sign or wonder, that could possibly be solved, should shake this evidence.

It is this that keeps the Jews in their obstinacy; though they cannot deny the matters of fact done by our blessed Saviour to be truly miracles, if so done as said. Nor can they deny that they were so done, because they have all the four marks before-mentioned. Yet they cannot yield! Why? Because they think that the gospel is in contradiction to the law; which if it were, the consequence would be unavoidable, that both could not be true. To solve this, is the business of the method with the Jews. But the contradiction which they suppose, is in their

comments that they put upon the law; especially they expect a literal fulfilling of those promises of the restoration of Jerusalem, and outward glories of the church, of which there is such frequent mention in the books of Moses, the Psalms, and all the Prophets. And many Christians do expect the same, and take those texts as literally as the Jews do. We do believe and pray for the conversion of the Jews. For this end they have been so miraculously preserved, according to the prophecies so long before of it. And when that time shall come, as they are the most honourable and ancient of all the nations on the earth, so will their church return to be the mother Christian church, as she was at first; and Rome must surrender to Jerusalem. Then all nations will flow thither; and even Ezekiel's temple may be literally built there, in the metropolis of the whole earth; which Jerusalem must be, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall meet with the conversion of the Jews. For no nation will then contend with the Jews, nor church with Jerusalem for supremacy. All nations will be ambitious to draw their original from the Jews, "whose are the fathers, and from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came." Then will be fulfilled that outward grandeur and restoration of the Jews and of Jerusalem, which they expect, pursuant to the prophecies.

They pretend not that this is limited to any particular time of the reign of the Messiah. They are sure it will not be at the beginning; for they expect to go through great conflicts and trials with their Messiah (as the Christian church has done) before his final conquest, and that they come to reign with

him. So that this is no obstruction to their embracing of Christianity. They see the same things fulfilled in us, which they expect themselves, and we expect the same things they do.

I tell this to the Deists, lest they may think that the Jews have some stronger arguments than they know of; that they are not persuaded by the miracles of our blessed Saviour, and by the fulfilling of all the prophecies in him, that were made concerning the Messiah. As I said before, I would not plead even miracles against these: and if this is sufficient to persuade a Jew, it is much more so to a Deist, who labours not under these objections.

Besides, I would not seem to clash with that (in a sound sense) reasonable caution used by Christian writers, not to put the issue of the truth wholly upon miracles, without this addition, when not done in contradiction to the revelations already given in the Holy Scriptures.

And they do it upon this consideration, that though it is impossible to suppose that God would work a real miracle, in contradiction to what he has already revealed; yet men may be imposed upon by false and seeming miracles, and pretended revelations, (as there are many examples, especially in the church of Rome,) and so may be shaken in the faith, if they keep not to the Holy Scriptures as their rule.

We are told, 2 Thess. ii. 9. "of him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders." And Rev. xiii. 14. xvi. 14. and xix. 20. of the devil and false prophets working miracles. But the word, in all these places, is only *signs*, as it is rendered Matt. xxv. 24. which,

though sometimes it may be used to signify real miracles, yet not always, nor in these places. For though every miracle be a sign and a wonder, yet every sign or wonder is not a miracle.

X. Here it may be proper to consider a common topic of the Deists, who, when they are not able to stand out against the evidence of fact, that such and such miracles have been done, then turn about, and deny such things to be miracles, at least we can never be sure whether any wonderful thing that is shown to us be a true or a false miracle.

And the great argument they go upon is this, that a miracle being that which exceeds the power of nature, we cannot know what exceeds it, unless we knew the utmost extent of the power of nature; and no man pretends to know that, therefore that no man can certainly know whether any event be miraculous; and, consequently, he may be cheated in his judgment betwixt true and false miracles.

To which I answer, that men may be so cheated, and there are many examples of it. But that, though we may not always know when we are cheated, yet we can certainly tell, in many cases, when we are not cheated.

For though we do not know the utmost extent of the power of nature, perhaps in any one thing; yet it does not follow that we know not the nature of any thing in some measure, and that certainly too. For example, though I do not know the utmost extent of the power of fire, yet I certainly know that it is the nature of fire to burn; and that when proper fuel is administered to it, it is contrary to the nature of fire not to consume it. Therefore, if I see three

men taken off the street, in their common wearing apparel, and, without any preparation, cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace, and that the flame was so fierce that it burned up those men that threw them in, and yet that those who were thrown in should walk up and down in the midst of the furnace; and I should see a fourth person with them of glorious appearance, like the Son of God; and that these men should come up again out of the furnace, without any harm, or so much as the smell of fire upon themselves or their clothes,—I could not be deceived in thinking that there was a stop put to the nature of fire, as to these men; and that it had its effect upon the men whom it burned, at the same time.

Again: though I cannot tell how wonderful and sudden an increase of corn might be produced by the concurrence of many causes, as a warm climate, the fertility of the soil, &c. yet this I can certainly know, that there is not that natural force in the breath of two or three words spoken, to multiply one small loaf of bread so fast, in the breaking of it, as truly and really, not only in appearance and show to the eye, but to fill the bellies of several thousand hungry persons; and that the fragments should be much more than the bread was at first. So, neither in a word spoken, to raise the dead, cure diseases, &c.

Therefore, though we know not the utmost extent of the power of nature, yet we certainly know what is contrary to the nature of several such things as we do know. And therefore, though we may be cheated and imposed upon in many seeming

miracles and wonders, yet there are some things wherein we may be certain.

But further, the Deists acknowledge a God of an almighty power, who made all things. Yet they would put it out of his power to make any revelation of his will to mankind. For if we cannot be certain of any miracle, how should we know when God sent any thing extraordinary to us? Nay, how should we know the ordinary power of nature, if we knew not what exceeded it? If we know not what is natural, how do we know there is such a thing as nature? That all is not supernatural, all miracles, and so disputable, till we come to downright scepticism, and doubt the certainty of our outward senses, whether we see, hear, or feel, or all be not a miraculous illusion!

Which because I know the Deists are not inclined to do, therefore I will return to pursue my argument upon the conviction of our outward senses, desiring only this, that they would allow the senses of other men to be as certain as their own; which they cannot refuse, since without this they can have no certainty of their own.

XI. Therefore, from what has been said, the cause is summed up shortly in this; that though we cannot see what was done before our time, yet by the marks which I have laid down concerning the certainty of matters of fact done before our time, we may be as much assured of the truth of them, as if we saw them with our eyes; because whatever matter of fact has all the four marks before-mentioned, could never have been invented and received but upon the conviction of the outward senses of all

those who did receive it, as before is demonstrated. And therefore this topic which I have chosen, does stand upon the conviction even of men's outward senses. And since you have confined me to one topic, I have not insisted upon the other, which I have only named.

XII. And now it lies upon the Deists, if they would appear as men of reason, to show some matter of fact of former ages, which they allow to be true, that has greater evidence of its truth than the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ; otherwise they cannot, with any show of reason, reject the one, and yet admit of the other.

But I have given them greater latitude than this, for I have shown such marks of the truth of the matters of fact of Moses and of Christ, as no other matters of fact of those times, however true, have, but these only; and I put it upon them to show any forgery that has all these marks.

This is a short issue. Keep them close to this. This determines the cause all at once.

Let them produce their Apollonius Tyanæus, whose life was put into English by the execrable Charles Blount,* and compared with all the wit and

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* The hand of that scorner, which durst write such outrageous blasphemy against his Maker, the Divine Vengeance has made his own executioner. Which I would not have mentioned, (because the like judgment has befallen others) but that the Theistical Club have set this up as a principle, and printed a vindication of this same Blount for murdering himself, by way of justification of self-murder; which some of them have since, as well as formerly, horridly practised upon themselves. Therefore, this is no common judgment to which they are delivered, but a visible mark set upon them, to show how far God has forsaken

malice he was master of, to the life and miracles of our blessed Saviour.

Let them take aid from all the legends in the church of Rome, those pious cheats, the sorest disgraces of Christianity; and which have bid the fairest of any one contrivance, to overturn the certainty of the miracles of Christ and his apostles, and whole truth of the Gospel, by putting them all upon the same footing: at least they are so understood by the generality of their devotees, though disowned and laughed at by the learned, and men of sense, among them.

Let them pick and choose the most probable of all the fables of the heathen deities, and see if they can find in any of these, the four marks beforementioned. Otherwise let them submit to the irrefragable certainty of the Christian religion.

XIII. But if, notwithstanding all that is said, the Deists will still contend that all this is but priest-craft, the invention of priests for their own profit, &c. then they will give us an idea of priests far different from what they intend: for then we must look upon these priests, not only as the cunningest and wisest of mankind, but we shall be tempted to adore them as deities, who have such power as to impose at their pleasure upon the senses of mankind, to make them believe that they had practised such public institutions, enacted them by laws, taught them to their children, &c. when they had never done any of these things, or ever so much

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them; and as a caution to all Christians, to beware of them, and not to come near the tents of these wicked men, lest they perish in their destruction, both of soul and body.

as heard of them before: and then, upon the credit of their believing that they had done such things as they never did, to make them further believe, upon the same foundation, whatever they pleased to impose upon them, as to former ages: I say, such a power as this must exceed all that is human, and, consequently, make us rank these priests far above the condition of mortals.

2. Nay, this were to make them outdo all that has ever been related of the infernal powers: for though their legerdemain has extended to deceive some unwary beholders, and their power of working some seeming miracles has been great, yet it never reached nor ever was supposed to reach so far, as to deceive the senses of all mankind, in matters of such public and notorious nature as those of which we now speak, to make them believe that they had enacted laws for such public observances, continually practised them, taught them to their children, and had been instructed in them themselves, from their childhood, if they had never enacted, practised, taught, or been taught such things.

3. And as this exceeds all the power of hell and devils, so is it more than ever God Almighty has done since the foundation of the world. None of the miracles that he has shown, or belief which he has required to any thing that he has revealed, has ever contradicted the outward senses of any one man in the world, much less of all mankind together. For miracles being appeals to our outward senses, if they should overthrow the certainty of our outward senses, must destroy with it all their own certainty as to us; since we have no other way to judge of a

miracle exhibited to our senses, than upon the supposition of the certainty of our senses, upon which we give credit to a miracle that is shown to our senses.

4. This, by the way, is yet an unanswered argument against the miracle of transubstantiation, and shows the weakness of the defence which the church of Rome offers for it, (from whom the Socinians have licked it up, and of late have gloried much in it amongst us,) that the doctrines of the Trinity or Incarnation contain as great seeming absurdities as that of transubstantiation: for I would ask, which of our senses it is which the doctrines of the Trinity or Incarnation do contradict? Is it our seeing, hearing, feeling, taste, or smell? Whereas transubstantiation does contradict all these. Therefore the comparison is exceedingly short, and out of purpose. But to return.

If the Christian religion be a cheat, and nothing else but the invention of priests, and carried on by their craft, it makes their power and wisdom greater than that of men, angels, or devils; and more than God himself ever yet showed or expressed, to deceive and impose upon the senses of mankind, in such public and notorious matters of fact.

XIV. And this miracle, which the Deists must run into, to avoid those recorded of Moses and Christ, is much greater and more astonishing than all the Scriptures tell of them. So that these men, who laugh at all miracles, are now obliged to account for the greatest of all, how the senses of mankind could be imposed upon in such public matters of fact. And how then can they make the priests

the most contemptible of all mankind, since they make them the sole authors of this, the greatest of miracles?

XV. And since the Deists (these men of sense and reason) have so vile and mean an idea of the priests of all religions, why do they not recover the world out of the possession and government of such blockheads? Why do they suffer kings and states to be led by them; to establish their deceits by laws, and inflict penalties upon the opposers of them? Let the Deists try their hands; they have been trying, and are now busy about it. And free liberty they have. Yet have they not prevailed, nor ever yet did prevail in any civilized or generous nation. And though they have some inroads among the Hottentots, and some other the most brutal part of mankind, yet are they still exploded, and priests have and do prevail against them, among not only the greatest, but best part of the world, and the most glorious for arts, learning, and war.

XVI. For as the devil does ape God in his institutions of religion, his feasts, sacrifices, &c. so likewise in his priests, without whom no religion, whether true or false, can stand. False religion is but a corruption of the true. The true was before it, though it be followed close upon the heels. The revelation made to Moses is older than any history extant in the heathen world. The heathens, in imitation of him, pretended likewise to their revelations: but I have given those marks which distinguish them from the true: none of them have those four marks before-mentioned.

Now the Deists think all revelations to be equally

pretended and a cheat; and the priests of all religions to be the same contrivers and jugglers; and therefore they proclaim war equally against all, and are equally engaged to bear the brunt of all. And if the contest be only betwixt the Deists and the priests, which of them as the men of the greatest parts and sense, let the effects determine it; and let the Deists yield the victory to their conquerors, who, by their own confession, carry all the world before them.

XVII. If the Deists say, that this is because all the world are blockheads, as well as those priests who govern them; that all are blockheads except the Deists, who vote themselves only to be men of sense; this (besides the modesty of it) will spoil their great and beloved topic, in behalf of what they call Natural Religion, against the Revealed, namely, appealing to the common reason of mankind; this they set up against revelation; think this to be sufficient for all the uses of men, here or hereafter, (if there be any after state) and therefore, that there is no use of revelation: this common reason they advance as infallible, at least as the surest guide, yet now cry out upon it, when it turns against them; when this common reason runs after revelation, (as it always has done) then common reason is a beast, and we must look for reason, not from the common sentiments of mankind, but only among the beaux, the Deists.

XVIII. Therefore, if the Deists would avoid the mortification (which will be very uneasy to them) to yield and submit to be subdued and hewed down before the priests, whom of all mankind they hate and despise; if they would avoid this, let them con-

fess, as the truth is, that religion is no invention of priests, but of divine original; that priests were instituted by the same author of religion; and that their order is a perpetual and living monument of the matters of fact of their religion, instituted from the time that such matters of fact were said to be done, as the Levites from Moses, the Apostles and succeeding Clergy from Christ, to this day; that no heathen priests can say the same; they were not appointed by the gods whom they served, but by others in after ages; they cannot stand the test of the four rules before-mentioned, which the Christian priests can do, and they only. Now the Christian priesthood, as instituted by Christ himself, and continued by succession to this day, being as impregnable and flagrant a testimony to the truth of the matters of fact of Christ, as the sacraments, or any other public institutions: besides that, if the priesthood were taken away, the sacraments and other public institutions, which are administered by their hands, must fall with them: therefore the devil has been most busy, and bent his greatest force in all ages against the priesthood, knowing that if that goes down, all goes with it.

XIX. With the Deists, there are others, who throw off the succession of our priesthood, (by which only it can be demonstrated) together with the sacraments and public institutions. And if the devil could have prevailed to have these dropt, the Christian religion would lose the most undeniable and demonstrative proof for the truth of the matter of fact of our Saviour, upon which the truth of his doctrine does depend. Therefore, we may see the

artifice and malice of the devil in all these attempts. And let those wretched instruments, whom he ignorantly (and some by a misguided zeal) has deluded thus to undermine Christianity, now at last look back and see the snare in which they have been taken; for if they had prevailed, or ever should, Christianity dies with them. At least it will be rendered precarious, as a thing of which no certain proof can be given. Therefore, let those of them, who have any zeal for the truth, bless God that they have not prevailed, and quickly leave them; and let all others be aware of them.

And let us consider and honour the priesthood, sacraments, and other public institutions of Christ, not only as a means of grace and helps to devotion, but as the great evidences of the Christian religion. Such evidences as no pretended revelation ever had, or can have. Such as do plainly distinguish it from all foolish legends and impostures whatsoever.

XX. And now, last of all, if one word of advice would not be lost upon men who think so unmeasurably of themselves as the Deists, you may represent to them what a condition they are in, who spend that life and sense which God has given them, in ridiculing the greatest of his blessings, his revelations of Christ, and by Christ, to redeem those from eternal misery, who shall believe in him, and obey his laws. And that God, in his wonderful mercy and wisdom, has so guarded his revelations, as that it is past the power of men or devils to counterfeit: and that there is no denying of them, unless we will be so absurd as to deny not only the reason but the certainty of the outward senses, not only of

one, or two, or three, but of mankind in general. That this case is so very plain, that nothing but want of thought can hinder any to discover it. That they must yield it to be so plain, unless they can show some forgery which has all the four marks before set down. But if they cannot do this, they must quit their cause, and yield a happy victory over themselves: or else sit down under all that ignominy with which they have loaded the priests, of being not only the most pernicious, but (what will gall them more) the most inconsiderate and inconsiderable of mankind.

Therefore, let them not think it an undervaluing of their worthiness, that their whole cause is comprised within so narrow a compass, and no more time bestowed upon it than it is worth. But let them rather reflect, how far they have been all this time from Christianity, whose rudiments they are yet to learn! How far from the way of salvation! How far the race of their lives is run, before they have set one step in the road to heaven! And, therefore, how much diligence they ought to use, to redeem all that time they have lost, lest they lose themselves for ever, and be convinced, by a dreadful experience, when it is too late, that the Gospel is a truth, and of the last consequence!

THE

TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY

DEMONSTRATED.

CHRISTIAN. IT is strange you should stand it out so against your own happiness, and employ your whole wit and skill to work in yourself a disbelief of any future rewards or punishments, only that you may live easy (as you think) in this world, and enjoy your pleasures. Which yet you cannot enjoy free and undisturbed, from the fear of those things that are to come, the event of which you pretend not to be sure of; and, therefore, are sure of a life full of trouble, that admits not of any consolation, and of a miserable and wretched death, according to the utmost that you yourself propose.

DEIST. How can you say that, when I propose to live without any fear of those things? I fear not hell, and I have discarded the expectation of heaven, because I believe neither.

C. Are you sure there are no such things?

D. That is a negative, and I pretend not to prove it.

C. Then you must remain in a doubt of it. And what a condition it is to die in this doubt, when the issue is eternal misery! And this is the utmost, by your own confession, that you can propose to yourself. Therefore, I called yours a disbelief, rather than a belief of any thing. It is we Christians who believe, you Deists only disbelieve. And if the event should prove as you would have it, and that we should all be annihilated at our death, we should be in as good a condition as you. But on the other hand, if the event should prove as we expect it, then you are eternally miserable, and we eternally happy. Therefore, one would think it the wisest part to take our side of the question; especially considering that those poor pleasures, for the sake of which you determine yourselves against us, are no real enjoyments. Nay, we had better be without them than have them, even as to this life itself. Is not temperance and a healthful constitution more pleasant than those pains and aches, sick head and stomach, that are inseparable companions of debauchery and excess, besides the clouding our reason, and turning sottish in our understanding.

D. We take pleasure in them for the time, and mind not the consequences.—But, however, a man cannot believe as he pleases. And, therefore, notwithstanding all the glorious and terrible things which you speak of, it makes nothing to me, unless you can evidently prove them to be so. And you must still leave me to judge for myself, after you have done all you can.

C. What I have said, is only to dispose you to

hear me impartially, and not to be prejudiced against your own happiness, both here and hereafter.

D. Well, without more prefacing, the case is this: I believe a God, as well as you; but for Revelation, and what you call the Holy Scriptures, I may think they were written by pious and good men, who might take this method of speaking, as from God, and in his name, as supposing that those good thoughts came from Him, and that it would have a greater effect upon the people; and might couch their morals under histories of things supposed to be done, as several of the wise Heathens have taken this course, in what they told of Jupiter and Juno, and the rest of their gods and goddesses. But as to the facts themselves, I believe the one no more than the other; or that all the facts in Ovid's Metamorphoses, or in Æsop's Fables, were true.

C. You seem willing by this to preserve a respectful esteem and value for the Holy Scriptures, as being written by pious and good men, and with a good design to reform the manners of men.

But your argument proves directly against the purpose for which you brought it, and makes the penmen of the Scriptures to be far from good men, to be not only cheats and impostors, but blasphemers, and an abomination before God. For such the same Scriptures frequently call those who presume to speak as from God, and in his name, when he had not sent them, and given them authority to do so. And the law in the Scriptures condemns such to be stoned to death as blasphemers. It was not so with the Heathens: their moralists did not

use the style of "Thus saith the Lord;" and their philosophers opposed and wrote against one another without any offence. For all the matter was, which of them could reason best; they pretended to no more. And for the facts of the fables of their gods, themselves did not believe them, and have written the mythology or moral that was intended by them.

D. But many of the common people did believe the facts themselves. As it is with the common people now in the church of Rome, who believe the most senseless and ridiculous stories in their books of legends to be as true as the Gospel; though the more wise among them call them only pious frauds, to increase the devotion of the people. And so we think of your Gospel itself, and all the other books you say were written by men divinely inspired. We will let you keep them to cajole the mob, but when you would impose them upon men of sense, we must come to the test with you.

C. That is what I desire; and to see whether there are no more evidences to be given for the truth of Christianity, that is, of the Holy Scriptures, than are given for the legends, and all the fabulous stories of the Heathen gods. And, if so, I will give up my argument, and confess that it is not in my power to convince you.

D. I cannot refuse to join issue with you upon this. To begin, then, I desire to know your evidences for the truth of your Scriptures, and the facts therein related.

C. If the truth of the book, and the facts therein related, be proved, I suppose you will not deny the doctrines to be true.

D. No: for if I saw such miracles with my eyes as are said to have been done by Moses and Christ, I could not think of any greater proof to be given, that such a one was sent of God. Therefore, if your Bible be true as to the facts, I must believe it in the doctrine too. But there are other books which pretend to give us revelations from God, and we must know which of these is true.

C. To distinguish this book from all others which pretend to give revelations from God, these four marks or rules were set down.

I. That the facts related be such of which men's outward senses, their eyes and ears, may judge.

[This cuts off enthusiastical pretences to revelation, and opinions which may be propagated in the dark, and like the tares, not known till they are grown up, and the first beginning of them not discovered.]

II. That these facts be done openly, in the face of the world.

III. That not only public monuments, but outward institutions and actions, should be appointed, and perpetually kept up in memory of them.

IV. That these institutions to be observed should commence from the time that the facts were done; and, consequently, that the book wherein these facts and institutions are recorded, should be written at the time, and by those who did the facts, or by eye and ear-witnesses. For that is included in this mark, and is the main part of it; to prevent false stories being coined in after ages of things done many hundred years before, which none alive can disprove. Thus Moses wrote his five books, containing his ac-

tions and institutions; and those of Christ were written by his disciples, who were eye and ear-witnesses of what they related. And particular care was taken of this, as you may see, Acts i. 21, 22. upon choosing one to supply the place of Judas: "Wherefore, of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." And St. John begins his first Epistle thus: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled,—that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

I have explained this fourth mark, because the Author of the Detection, either wilfully or ignorantly, seems not to understand it. And this alone overthrows all the stories he has told, which he would make parallel to the facts of Moses and of Christ; and therefore alleges that they have all these four marks. But he must begin again, and own that these four marks still stand an irrefragable proof of the truth of any fact which has them all, till he can produce a book which was written by the actors or eye-witnesses of the facts it relates, and show that such facts, having the other three marks, have been detected to be false. Which when he can do, I will give him up these four marks as an insufficient proof, and own I was mistaken in them. But hitherto they have stood the test; for he himself will not say he has produced any such book in all his Detection.

If he says that facts may be true, though no such

book can be produced for them, and though they have not all the aforesaid marks, I will easily grant it. But all I contend for is, that whatever has all these four marks, cannot be false. For example; could Moses have persuaded six hundred thousand men that he had led them through the sea in the manner related in Exodus, if it had not been true? If he could, it would have been a greater miracle than the other. The like of their being fed forty years in the wilderness without bread, by manna rained down to them from heaven. The like of Christ's feeding five thousand at a time with five loaves; and so of all the rest. The two first marks secure from any cheat or imposture at the time the facts were done, and the two last marks secure equally from any imposition in after-ages, because this book, which relates these facts, speaks of itself as written at that time by the actors or eye-witnesses, and as commanded by God to be carefully kept and preserved to all generations, and read publicly to all the people, at stated times, as is commanded, Deut. xxxi. 10, 11, 12. and was practised, Josh. viii. 34, 35. Neh. viii. &c. And the institutions appointed in this book were to be perpetually observed, from the day of the institution, for ever among these people, in memory of the facts, as the passover, Exod. xii. and so of the rest. Now, suppose this book to have been forged a thousand years after Moses, would not every one say, when it first appeared, we never heard of this book before; we know of no such institutions, as of a passover, or circumcision, or Sabbaths, and the many feasts and fasts therein appointed, of a tribe of Levi, and a tabernacle, wherein they were to serve

in such an order of priesthood, &c.? Therefore, this book must be an arrant forgery; for it wants all those marks it gives of itself, as to its own continuance, and of those institutions it relates. No instance can be shown, since the world began, of any book so circumstantiated, that was a forgery, and passed as truth upon any people. I think it impossible; and therefore, that the four marks are still an invincible proof of the truth of that book, and those facts wherein all these marks do meet.

But, since I am come upon this subject again, I will endeavour to improve it, and give four other marks, some of which no fact, however true, ever had or can have, but the fact of Christ alone. Thus, while I support the fact of Moses, I set that of Christ above him, as the Lord is above the servant. And the Jews being herein principally concerned, I will consider their case likewise, as we go along; therefore I add this fifth mark as peculiar to our Bible, and to distinguish it from all other histories which relate facts formerly done.

V. That the book which relates the facts contains likewise the law of that people to whom it belongs, and be their statute-book by which their causes are determined. This will make it impossible for any to coin or forge such a book, so as to make it pass upon any people. For example; if I should forge a statute-book for England, and publish it next term, could I make all the judges, lawyers, and people, believe that this was their true and only statute-book, by which their causes had been determined these many hundred years past? They must forget their old statute-book, and believe that this new book,

which they never saw or heard of before, was that same old book which has been pleaded in Westminster Hall for so many ages, which has been so often printed, and the originals of which are now kept in the Tower, to be consulted as there is occasion.

D. I grant that to be impossible. But how do you apply it?

C. It is evident as to the books of Moses, which are not only a history of the Jews, but their very statute-book, wherein their municipal law, as well civil as ecclesiastical, was contained.

D. This is so, indeed, as to the books of Moses, to which they always appealed: "To the law and to the testimony." And they had no other statute-book. But this will not agree to your Gospel, which is no municipal law, nor any civil law at all, and no civil causes were tried by it.

C. The law was given to the Jews, as a distinct and separate people from all other nations upon the earth; and therefore was a municipal law, particularly for that nation only of the Jews. But Christianity was to extend to all the nations of the earth, and Christians were to be gathered out of all nations; and therefore the Gospel could not be a municipal law, as to civil rights, to all nations, who had each their own municipal laws. This could not be without destroying all the municipal laws in the world, of every nation whatsoever; and then none could be a Christian, without, at the same time, becoming a rebel to the government where he lived. This would have been for Christ to have immediately set up for universal and temporal King of all the world, as the Jews expected of their Messiah, and therefore would

have made Christ a King. But he instructed them in the spiritual nature of his kingdom, that it was not "of this world," nor did respect their temporal or civil matters; which, therefore, he left in the same state he found them, and commanded their obedience to their civil governors, though heathen, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. And as to the law of Moses, he left the Jews still under it as to their civil concerns, so far as the Romans, under whose subjection they then were, would permit them. As Pilate said to them, "Ye have a law; and judge ye him according to your law."

But the Gospel was given as the spiritual and ecclesiastical law to the church, whithersoever dispersed through all nations; for that did not interfere with their temporal laws, as to civil government. And in this the fifth mark is made stronger to the Gospel than even to the law; for it is easier to suppose that any forgery might creep into the municipal law of a particular nation, than that all the nations whither Christianity is spread should conspire in the corruption of the Gospel, which, to all Christians, is of infinitely greater concern than their temporal laws. And, without such a concert of all Christian nations and people supposed, no such forgery could pass undiscovered in the Gospel, which is spread as far as Christianity, and read daily in their public offices.

D. But I say it is discovered, as appears by the multitude of your various lections.

C. That cannot be called a forgery; it is nothing but such mistakes as may very easily happen, and are almost unavoidable, in so many copies as have been made of the Gospel, before printing was known.

And, considering the many translations of it into several languages, where the idioms are different, and phrases may be mistaken, together with the natural slips of amanuenses, it is much more wonderful that there are no more various lections, than that there are so many.

But in this appears the great providence of God, in the care the Christians took of this, that they have marked every the least various lection, even syllabical; and that, among all these, there is not found one which makes any alteration, either in the facts or in the doctrines. So that, instead of an objection, this becomes a strong confirmation of the truth and certainty of the Gospel, which stands thus perfectly clear of so much as any doubt concerning the facts or the doctrines therein related.

But I will now proceed to a stronger evidence than even this, and all that has been said before; which I have made the sixth mark, and that is the topic of prophecy.

VI. The great fact of Christ's coming into the world was prophesied of in the Old Testament from the beginning to the end, as it is said, Luke i. 70. "By all the holy prophets which have been since the world began."

This evidence no other fact ever had; for there was no prophecy of Moses, but Moses himself did prophesy of Christ, Deut. xviii. 15. (applied Acts iii. 22, 23, 24.) and sets down the several promises given of him. The first was to Adam, immediately after the fall, Gen. iii. 15. where he is called "the seed of the woman," but not of the man, because he was to have no man for his father, though he

had a woman to his mother. And of none other can this be said, nor that he should "bruise the serpent's head," that is, overcome the devil and all his power.

He was again promised to Abraham, as you may see, Gen. xii. 3. xviii. 18. See this applied, Gal. iii. 16.

Jacob did expressly prophesy of him, with a mark of the time when he should come, and calls him "Shiloh," or "He that was to be sent." Gen. xlix. 10.

Balaam prophesied of him by the name of the Star of Jacob, and Sceptre of Israel, Numb. xxiv. 17.

Daniel calls him the Messiah, the Prince; and tells the time of his coming and of his death, Dan. ix. 25, 26.

It was foretold that he should be born of a virgin, Isa. vii. 14. In the city of Bethlehem, Micah v. 2. Of the seed of Jesse, Isa. xi. 1, 10. His low estate and sufferings are particularly described, Psal. xxii. and Isa. liii. And his resurrection, Psal. xvi. 10. That he should sit upon the throne of David for ever, and be called "Wonderful," the "Mighty God," the "Prince of Peace," Isa. ix. 6, 7. "The Lord our Righteousness," Jer. xxxiii. 16. Jehovah Tsidkenu, (an incommunicable name given to none but the great God alone.) And Immanuel, that is, "God with us," Isa. vii. 14. And David, whose son he was, according to the flesh, called him his lord, Psal. cx. 1.

The cause of his sufferings is said to be for the sins of the people, and not for himself, Isa. liii. 4, 5, 6. Dan. ix. 26.

And as to the time of his coming, it is expressly said, (to the confusion of the Jews now) that it was to be before the sceptre should depart from Judah, Gen. xlix. 10. In the second temple, Hag. ii. 7, 9. Within seventy weeks of the building of it, Dan. ix. 24. that is, (according to the prophetical known style of a day for a year) within four hundred and ninety years after.

From these, and many more prophecies of the Messiah or Christ, his coming was the general expectation of the Jews from the beginning, but more especially, about the time in which it was foretold he should come, when several false Messiahs did appear among them. And this expectation still remains with them, though they confess that the time foretold by all the Prophets for his coming, is past.

But what I have next to offer will be more strange to you. You may say it was natural for the Jews to expect their Messiah, who was prophesied of in their book of the law, and was to be a Jew, and King of all the earth. But what had the Gentiles to do with this? There were no prophecies to them.

Therefore, what I have to show you is, that these prophecies of the Messiah were likewise to the Gentiles. For it is said he should be the expectation of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews. And Gen. xlix. 10. that "the gathering of the people (or nations) should be to him." In the vulgar it is rendered *expectatio gentium*, "the expectation of the Gentiles." He is called "the desire of all nations," Hag. ii. 7. And I will show you the general expectation the Gentiles had of his coming, about the time that he did come.

They knew him by the name of the East. Their tradition was, that the East should prevail, as I will show you presently. But first let me tell you, that the Holy Scripture often alludes to him under this denomination. The blood of the great expiatory sacrifice was to be sprinkled towards the East, Lev. xvi. 14. to show whence the true expiatory sacrifice should come. And he is thus frequently styled in the Prophets. Zech. iii. 8. it is said, according to the vulgar, " I will bring forth my servant the East." And chap. vi. 12. " Behold the man whose name is the East." Our English renders it, in both places, the " Branch," for the Hebrew word bears both senses. But the Greek renders it, Ἀνατολὴ, which we translate the " day-spring," Luke i. 78. and put on the margin ' sun-rising or branch.' The vulgar has it " the East, or Sun rising from on high." He is called the " Sun of Righteousness," Mal. iv. 2. And it is said, Isa. lx. 3. " The Gentiles shall " come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

Now, Sir, how literally was this fulfilled in the Magi (generally supposed to be kings) coming from the East, led by a star which appeared to them in the East, to worship Christ when he was born, and to bring presents unto him as unto a king! As it is told in the second of St. Matthew.

D. Why do you quote St. Matthew to me? You know we make no more of him than of one of your legend writers, and believe this story no more than that these three kings are now buried at Cologne.

C. You make great use of the legends, and an-

swer every thing by them; and I confess they are the greatest affront to Christianity, and (if possible) a disproof of it, as it must be to those who will place them upon the same footing with the Holy Bible, as too many do in the Church of Rome, and cry, we have the authority of the Church for both. And they are taught to receive the Holy Scriptures upon the authority of the Church only. But my business is not with them now; I shall only say, that when they can bring such evidences for the truth of their legends, or for any particular fact in them, as I do for the Holy Scriptures, and in particular for the fact of Christ, then I will believe them.

D. Will you believe nothing that has not all those evidences you produce?

C. Far from it; for then I must believe nothing but this single fact of Christ; because no other fact in the world, no, not of all those recorded in Holy Scriptures, has all these evidences which the fact of Christ has. And so God has thought fitting, that this great fact, above all other facts, of the greatest glory to God, and importance to mankind, should appear with greater and more undeniable evidence than any other fact ever was in the world.

D. We are now upon the particular fact of the Magi, or wise men, coming to Christ. Have you any more to say as to that?

C. It has those same evidences that the truth of the Bible in general has, which are more than can be produced for any other book in the world. But now as to this fact in particular: St. Matthew was the first who wrote the Gospel, and it was in the same age when this fact was said to be done. And can you

think it possible, that such a fact as this could have passed without contradiction, and a public exposing of Christianity, then so desirable and so much endeavoured by the unbelieving Jews, their high-priests, elders, &c. as the only means for their own preservation, if the fact had not been notorious and fresh in the memory of all the people then at Jerusalem, namely, that these wise men came thither, and that Herod and the whole city were troubled at the news they brought of the birth of the King of the Jews; that Herod thereupon gathered all the chief Priests and Scribes of the people together, that they might search out of the prophets, and know the place Christ should be born; and then the slaughter of the infants in and about Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, which followed—I say, could such a fact as this have passed at that very time, if it had not been true? Could St. Matthew have hoped to have palmed this upon all the people, and upon those very same chief Priests and Scribes, who, he said, were so far concerned in it? Would none of them have contradicted it, if it had been a forgery—especially when the detecting it would have strangled Christianity in its birth? Would not they have done it, who suborned false witnesses against Christ, and gave large money to the soldiers to conceal (if possible) his resurrection? Would not they have done it, who persecuted Christianity with all spite and fury, and invented all imaginable false stories and calumnies against it? Whereas here was one at hand, this of the Magi, which, if false, could have been so easily detected, by appealing to every man, woman, and child, I may say, in Jerusalem, Beth-

lehem, and even in all Judea; who, no doubt, had heard of the terrible massacre of so many infants, and the cause of it.

D. I can give no account why the writers against Christianity did not offer to contradict this fact of the star and the Magi, which is put in the very front of this Gospel of St. Matthew. And there it is called his (Christ's) star. "We have seen his star in the East."—As if God had created a new and extraordinary star on purpose, as the signal of Christ hung out in the heavens, to give the world notice of his birth. But did none of the heathen philosophers take notice of this star, or of this relation given of it by your St. Matthew?

C. Yes. For Chalcidius, in his comment upon Plato's Timæus, speaking of the presages of stars mentioned by Plato, adds as a further proof—"There is likewise another more venerable and holy history," by which I doubt not he means this of St. Matthew; for what he tells seems to be taken out of it, "That by the rising of a certain unusual star, not plagues and diseases, but the descent of the venerable God, for the salvation and benefit of mortals, was observed by the Chaldeans, who worshipped this God newly born, by offering gifts unto him."

D. This makes those Magi or wise men to have been Chaldeans, who I know, were the most noted then in the world for the most curious learning, particularly in astronomy. And they were likewise east of Jerusalem, so that it might be well said they came from the east, and had seen his star in the east. But I cannot imagine how they should read

the birth of a God in the face of a new star; and how that star should send them particularly to Jerusalem, though I may suppose it pointed them westward.

C. This will be easier to you, when you know, that all over the east there was a tradition, or fixed opinion, that about that time a King of the Jews would be born, who should rule the whole earth. And the appearance of this extraordinary star in the east, was taken by them as a sign that he was then born. And whither should they go to look for the King of the Jews, but to Jerusalem? And when they came thither they inquired, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." This made Herod gather the Priests and Scribes together. And they, by searching the Prophets, found that Bethlehem was the place; whereupon the wise men went to Bethlehem; and to convince them that they were right, the star which they had seen in the east appeared to them again, and "went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." This made them "rejoice with such an exceeding great joy."

D. This would go down in some measure with me, if you could make good your first *postulatum*, of such a current tradition or opinion in the east; but for this you have given no sort of proof. And all the rest which you have inferred from thence must come to the ground with it, if it be not supported. I confess it would seem as strange to me as the star to the wise men, if God had (we know not how, it is unaccountable to us) sent such a notion into the minds of men, and at that time only, of

such a King to be born, and that he should be a Jew, (the then most contemptible people in the world, subdued and conquered by the Romans,) and that he was to be King of the Jews, and thence to become King of all the earth, and conquer his conquerors. The Romans would have looked with disdain upon such a notion or prophecy as this; it would have made some stir among them, if they had heard of it, or given any credit to it.

C. You argue right; and I will show you what stir it made among them, and I hope you will take their word, as well for this eastern tradition, as for the effects it had among themselves. Nay, they wanted not the same tradition among themselves, and express prophecies of it, in their Sibyls, and otherwise. So that the same expectation of the Messiah was then current over all the earth, with the Gentiles as well as with the Jews.

Tacitus in his History, l. v. c. 13. speaking of the great prodigies that preceded the destruction of Jerusalem, says, that many understood these as the forerunners of that extraordinary Person whom the ancient books of the Priests did foretel should come about that time from Judea, and obtain the universal dominion; his words are: "Many were persuaded that it was contained in the old writings of the Priests, that at that very time the East should prevail, and the Jews should have the dominion." And Suetonius, in the Life of Vespasian, c. i. n. 4. says, "That it was an ancient and constant opinion (or tradition) throughout the whole east, that at that time those who came from Judea should obtain the dominion;" that is, some Jew should be universal

King. Therefore Cicero, who was a commonwealthman, in his second book of Divination, speaking of the books of the Sibyls, who likewise foretold this great King to come, says, "Let us deal with these Priests, and let them bring any thing out of their books, rather than a king, whom neither the Gods nor men will suffer after this at Rome."

But he was mistaken, and had his head cut off for writing against kingly government. And others more considerable than he laid greater stress upon these prophecies, even the whole senate of Rome, as I come to show you.

Whether these Sibyls gathered their prophecies out of the Old Testament, is needless here to examine. I am now only upon that general expectation which was then in the world, of this great and universal King to come about that time.

The same year that Pompey took Jerusalem, one of these oracles of the Sibyls made a great noise, which was, "That nature was about to bring forth a king to the Romans." Which, as Suetonius relates in the Life of Augustus, c. 94. did so terrify the senate, that they made a decree to expose, that is, destroy all the children born that year. "That none born that year should be brought up, but exposed, that is, left in some wood or desert place to perish." But he tells how this dreadful sentence was prevented: "That those senators whose wives were with child, because each was in hopes of having this great king, took care that the decree of the senate should not be put into the ærarium or treasury, without which, by their constitution, the decree could not be put in execution." And Appian, Plu-

tarch, Sallust, and Cicero, do all say, that it was this prophecy of the Sibyls which raised the ambition of Corn. Lentulus at that time, hoping that he should be this king of the Romans. Virgil, a few years before the birth of Christ, in his fourth Eclogue, quotes a prophecy of one of these Sibyls, speaking of an extraordinary person to be born about that time, who should introduce a golden age into the world, and restore all things, and should blot out our sins; and calls him,

"Dear offspring of the gods, and great son of Jove."

He describes a new state of things, like the "new heavens," and "new earth," Isa. lxv. 17.

"A great order of ages does begin, wholly new."

And as Isaiah describes the happy state in the "new earth," that "the lion and the lamb should feed together, the serpent eat dust, and that they should not hurt or destroy in all the holy mountain," Isa. lxv. 25. Virgil does almost repeat his words:

"—— Nec magnos metuent armenta leones.
Occidet et serpens, et fallax herba veneni
Occidet."——

And as God introduces the Messiah with saying, "I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea," Hag. ii. 7. Virgil does in a manner translate it in this Eclogue, introducing the great person then to be born, and the joy which should be in the whole creation:

"Lo! teeming nature bending with its load,
The earth, the ocean, and the heavens high,
Behold how all rejoice to greet the coming age."

Here the poet describes nature as in labour to

bring forth this great king, as the other prophecy of the Sibyls before-mentioned speaks. And he says, "That the time was then at hand."

"Now a new progeny from heaven descends."

And he applies it to Saloninus, the son of Pollio the consul, then newly born, as if it was to be fulfilled in him. But as there was nothing like it in the event, so these words are too great to be applied to any mortal, or the reign of any king that ever was in the world; or to any other but to the Messiah, the Lord of heaven and earth.

D. But you know the authority of these Sibyls is disputed. Some say the Christians did interpolate them, and added to them in about a hundred years after Christ.

C. It is true, the Christians did often quote them against the heathens, as St. Paul quoted the heathen poets to the Athenians, Acts xvii. 28. And Clem. Alexandrinus, in his Strom. l. 6. says, that St. Paul quoted the Sibyls likewise in his disputations with the Gentiles. And the Christians were called Sibyllianists, from their quoting the Sibyls so often. But Origen, in his answer to Celsus, l. 7. challenges him to show any interpolation made by the Christians, and appeals to the heathen copies which were in their own possession, and kept with great care.

But what I have quoted to you out of Virgil was before Christ was born, and therefore clear of all these objections.

D. Then the Jews must have had some hand in them. As likewise in that Eastern tradition you have spoken of.

C. If so, you must suppose that the Jews had it from their own Prophets. And this will be a strong confirmation that the time of the Messiah's coming was plainly told in the Prophets.

D. What say the Jews to this? For I cannot imagine how they can get off of it.

C. Some of them say, that the Messiah put off his coming at the appointed time, because of their sins. Others say, he did come at the time, but has concealed himself ever since.

D. These are mere excuses. Do they pretend any prophecy for this? But to what purpose? For these excuses show, that prophecies are no proofs, because, if they may be thus put off, they can never be known. And they may be put off and put off to the end of the world.

C. But now, Sir, as to your point. If this general expectation, both east and west, of the great King of the Jews to be born about that very time that he did come, was occasioned by the Jewish tradition of it, strengthens the truth of the Holy Scriptures, whence the Jews had it. But otherwise, if God, we know not how, did send such a notion into the minds of men, all over the world, at that particular time, and never the like, either before or since, then the miracle will be greater, and the attestation to the coming of Christ stronger, and, as you said, it will be more wonderful and more convincing to you than the star was to the wise men in the East.

D. I must take time to answer this. I made nothing at all of this of the Magi, and the star, and of Herod's slaying the infants upon it. I thought it a ridiculous story, and to have no foundation in the

world. But when I see Suetonius telling us of the decree of the senate of Rome to destroy all the children born that year, and for the same reason, for fear of this great King that was then to be born; I must think there was a strange chiming in of things here, one to answer the other. I know not how it happened. By chance, or how?

C. You cannot imagine there could be any concert in this matter. That the Chaldeans, and Romans, and Jews, should all agree upon the point, and hit it so exactly, without any one of them discovering the contrivance! especially when it was so terrible to both the Romans and the Jews, that they took such desperate methods to prevent it as to destroy their own children!

D. It is ridiculous to talk of a concert. I will not put my cause upon that. Would they concert what they thought their own destruction? Besides, the Jews and Romans were then enemies; and the Chaldeans were far off, and had little correspondence with either of them. And such a universal notion could not be concerted. Whole nations could not be trusted with a secret. And if they all kept it, and against their own interest too, it would be as great a miracle as any in your Bible.

C. How much more impossible is it to suppose, that there should be a concert between different ages, between all the ages from Adam downwards, in all those prophecies of the coming of the Messiah! How should they know it but by revelation? And would they have all agreed so exactly as to the time, place, manner, and other circumstances, if it had been a forgery contrived by different persons and in different ages?

This is an argument which St. Peter thought stronger than the conviction even of our outward senses; for having set down what he and the other two Apostles had both seen and heard upon the holy mount, he adds, "We have yet a more sure word (that is, a stronger proof) of prophecy, whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts," 2 Pet. i. 19.—And he enforceth it thus: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

D. I will grant his argument so far, that it is easier to suppose the senses of three men, or of all the men in the world, to be imposed upon, than that Adam, Abraham, and I had concerted together. But I will not give you my answer yet. Have you any more to say upon this head of prophecy?

C. I need say no more till your answer comes. For you have granted that this proof is stronger than what we see with our eyes.

But that your answer may take in all together, I will give you something further. I have set down already some of the great prophecies of the coming of Christ, his sufferings, death, and resurrection. But there are others which reach to several minute circumstances, such as cannot be applied to any other fact that ever yet happened, and which could not have been foreseen by any but God; nor were known by the actors who did them, else they had not done them. For they would not have fulfilled the prophecies that went before of Christ, in applying them to him whom they crucified as a false Christ.

See then how literally several of these prophecies

were fulfilled. As Psal. lxix. 21.—"They gave me gall to eat and vinegar to drink." Then read Matt. xxvii. 34. "They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall." It is said, Psal. xxii. 16, 17, 18. "They pierced my hands and my feet—They stand staring and looking upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." As if it had been written after John xix. 23, 24. It was merely accidental in the soldiers; they would not tear his coat, because it was woven and without seam, therefore they cast lots for it; thus fulfilling this Scripture, without any knowledge of theirs, for they were Roman soldiers, and knew nothing of the Scripture. Again it is said, Psal. xxii. 7, 8. "All they that see me, laugh me to scorn: they shoot out their lips and shake their heads, saying, He trusted in God that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, if he will have him." Compare this with Matt. xxvii. 39, 41, 42, 43. "And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying—Come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God." It is said again, Zech. xii. 10. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." His very price was foretold, and how the money should be disposed of, Zech. xi. 13. fulfilled Matt. xxvii. 6, 7. And his riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, Zech ix. 9. which the learned Rabbi Saadia expounds of the Messiah. That he should suffer with malefactors, Isaiah liii. 12. That his body should not lie so long in the grave as to see corruption, Psal. xvi. 10.

Many other circumstances are told which cannot be applied to any but to Christ. I have set down these few, that you may take them into consideration when you think fit to give your answer as to this head of prophecies. And you are to take care to find some other fact guarded with prophecies like this. Or else you must confess that there is no other fact that has such evidence as this.

But before I leave this head, I must mention the prophecies in our Bible, of things yet to come to the end of the world, and of the new heavens and new earth that shall succeed.

D. These can be no proofs here, because we cannot see the fulfilling of them.

C. You may believe what is to come, by the fulfilling you have seen of what is past. But I bring this now to show you, that there is no other law or history in the world that so much as pretends to this, or to know what is to come. This is peculiar to the Holy Bible, as being written from the mouth of God.

You have seen how the current of the prophecies of the Old Testament did point at and centre in that great event, the coming of the Messiah. When he was come, then he told us more plainly of what was to come after him, even to the consummation of all things. And by what we have seen exactly fulfilled of all he told us to this time, we must believe what remains yet to come.

How particularly did he foretel the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Matt. xxiv. And that that age should not pass till it should be fulfilled? And his very expression was literally fulfilled. That

there should not be left one stone upon another in the temple, for the very foundations of it were ploughed up by Turnus Rufus. See Scaliger's Canon. Isagog. p. 304.

When Jerusalem was first besieged, it was full of Christians. But the siege was raised unaccountably, and for no reason that history gives. In which time the Christians seeing those signs come to pass which Christ had foretold would precede its destruction, and particularly laying hold of that caution he gave, "Then let them that are in Judea flee to the mountains," and that in such haste, as that he that was in the field was not to return (to Jerusalem) to fetch his garment, or he on the house-top there to stay to take his goods with him; accordingly all the Christians left Jerusalem, and fled to Pella, a city in the mountains. And as soon as they were all gone, the Romans returned and renewed the siege. And so it came to pass, that when Titus sacked the city, there was not one Christian found there, and the destruction fell only upon the unbelieving Jews. The others escaped, as Lot out of Sodom, by believing the prediction of that ruin.

Another very remarkable prediction of our blessed Lord, in that same chapter, was of the many false Christs that should come after him; and he warned the Jews not to follow them, for that it would be to their destruction. "Behold, (says he, ver. 25.) I have told you before." But they would not believe him; and accordingly it came to pass. Josephus, in his Antiquities of the Jews, l. xviii. c. 12. l. xx. c. 6. and De Bell. Jud. l. vii. c. 31. tells of abundance of these false Messiahs, who appeared before the

destruction of Jerusalem, and led the people into the wilderness, where they were miserably destroyed. The very thing of which our Saviour cautioned them, ver. 26. "If they say unto you, Behold, he (that is Christ) is in the desert, go not forth." And De Bell. Jud. l. vii. c. 12. Josephus says, that the chief cause of their obstinacy in that war with the Romans, was their expectation of a Messiah to come and deliver them, which brought on their ruin, and made them deaf to the offers of Titus, who courted them to peace.

And, since the destruction of Jerusalem, there have been so many false Messiahs, that Johannes à Lent has written a history of them, printed Herbonæ, 1697. Which brings them down as far as the year 1682. And tells the lamentable destruction of the Jews in following them.

But the next prophecy of our blessed Lord which I produce, is more remarkable than these, and of which you see the fulfilling in a great measure, namely, That his Gospel should prevail over all the world, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against it: and this told when he was low and despised, and had but twelve poor fishermen for his followers: and that his religion should conquer, not by the sword, like Mahomet's, but by patient suffering, as lambs among wolves. And in this state the church endured most terrible persecutions, when all the rage of hell was let loose against her for the first three hundred years, without any help but from heaven only: till at last, by the Divine Providence, the great Emperor of Rome, and other mighty Kings and Princes, without any force or compulsion,

did voluntarily and freely submit their sceptres to Christ.

No religion that ever was in the world was so begun, so propagated, and did so prevail: and hence we assuredly trust, that what remains will be fulfilled, of the promise of Christ to his church in the latter days. But I speak now only of this prophecy so long beforehand, and when there was so little appearance of its coming to pass, so far as we have seen already.

Let me here remember one particular passage foretold by Christ concerning the woman who anointed his body to the burying, that "wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her," Mark xiv. 8, 9. And we see how it is spoken of to this day.

D. If this book had been lost, we had not heard of this prophecy.

C. So you may say of all the Bible, or of any other book: but Providence has fulfilled this prophecy by preserving the book: and it is a prophecy that this book, at least this fact of the woman, should be preserved for ever, and it may be preserved though that book were lost.

D. When prophecies are fulfilled, and the events come to pass, they are plain to every body; but why might they not have been as plain from the beginning? And then there could have been no dispute about them, as if it had been said, that such a one by name, at such a time, and in such a place, should do such things, &c.

C. Because God, having given man free will, he

does not force men to do any wicked thing: and it would be in the power of wicked men to defeat a prophecy against themselves, as to the circumstance of time, place, or the manner of doing the thing. For example, if the Jews had known that Christ had told his Apostles he was to be crucified, they would not have done it: they would have stoned him as they did St. Stephen; for that was the death appointed by the law for blasphemy: and they several times attempted to have stoned Christ for this, because he said, "I am the Son of God." But crucifixion was a death by the Roman law. Therefore, the Jews, to fulfil this prophecy (but not knowing it) delivered Christ to the Romans to be put to death. Yet he told them so much of it, that after he was crucified they might know it, as he said to them, John viii. 28. "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he." And chap. xii. 32, 33. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die." But they understood it not till they had done it; then they knew what the lifting up meant. And chap. xviii. 31, 32. when Pilate would have had them judge him according to their law, which was stoning, they were cautious at this time only, and said, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" because they were then under the government of the Romans. But the next words show the design of Providence in it, "that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die." They had no such caution upon them when they stoned St. Stephen after this, nor the many times

before when they took up stones to stone the same Jesus.

Then again, the piercing his side with the spear was no part of the Roman sentence of execution, but happened seemingly by mere accident; for the sentence of the law was, to hang upon the cross till they were dead; but that being the day of preparation for the Sabbath, which began that evening soon after Christ and the thieves were fastened to the cross, before it could be supposed they were dead; therefore, "that the bodies might not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath-day," the Jews besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, (which was no part of the sentence neither, but done) lest they should escape when taken down. Accordingly, the legs of the thieves were broken, for they were yet alive, and the reason why they brake not the legs of Christ was, because "they saw that he was dead already:" but to make sure, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear: little knowing that they were then fulfilling prophecies, as that "a bone of him should not be broken." And again, "They shall look on him whom they pierced." As little did the soldiers think of it when they were casting lots upon his vesture: and the chief priests (if they had known it or reflected upon it) would not have upbraided him in the very words that were foretold in Psalm xxii. which I have before quoted. And they would have contrived the money they gave to Judas to have been one piece more or less than just thirty; they would not have come so punctually in the way of that prophecy, Zech. xi. 12, 13. "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver." And

they would have bought any other field with it, but especially not that of the potter, which Zechariah there likewise mentions.

And as the enemies of Christ did not know they were fulfilling these prophecies of him, so neither did his disciples at the time when they were so doing. And it is said, John xii. 16. "These things understood not his disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him." This makes the fulfilling these prophecies yet more remarkable.

Where Providence sees that prophecies will not be minded, they are more express and plain: as likewise where the passions and interests of men will hurry them on towards fulfilling them. Thus Alexander the Great is described as plainly almost as if he had been named, Dan. viii. 20, 21, 22. And it is said, that this prophecy, which was showed him by the high priest at Jerusalem, did encourage him in his expedition against the Persians. But it is not so when a man is to do foolish and wicked things, and things hurtful to himself; for if these were told plainly and literally, it would be in his power to do otherwise; unless God should force his will, and then he would not be a free agent.

D. I must have recourse to the Jews in answer to these prophecies of the Messiah which you have brought; for they owning these Scriptures as revelations given them by God, must have some solution or other for them, or else give themselves up as self-condemned.

C. The answers the Jews give will convince you

the more, and render them indeed self-condemned. Before the coming of Christ, the Jews understood these texts, as we do, to be certainly meant of the Messiah, and of none other. But since that time they have forced themselves to put the most strained and contradictory meanings upon them; for they agree not in their expositions, and the one does manifestly destroy the other. Thus that text I before quoted, Gen. xlix. 10. was understood by the Chaldee and ancient Jewish interpreters to be meant of the Messiah. Yet of their modern Rabbies some say, that it was meant of Moses; but others reject that, first, because it is plain that the gathering of the nations or Gentiles was not to Moses. Secondly, because the sceptre was not given to Judah till long after Moses. The first of it that appears was Judges xx. 18. when Judah was commanded by God to "go up first," and lead the rest of the tribes; and David was the first king of the tribe of Judah. Thirdly, because Moses did prophecy of a greater than himself to come, to whom the people should hearken, Deut. xviii. 15, 18, 19.

For these reasons other Rabbies say it could not be meant of Moses, but they apply it to the tabernacle of Shiloh. This was only for the sake of the word Shiloh, for otherwise it bears no resemblance either to the gathering of the Gentiles, or the sceptre of Judah: and though the house of God was first set up at Shiloh, yet it was removed from thence, and established at Jerusalem; which was the place of which Moses spoke that God would place his name there, as I shall show you presently.

This interpretation therefore being rejected, other

Rabbies say, that this prophecy must be meant of the Messiah, but that by the word sceptre, is not to be understood a sceptre of rule or government, but of correction and punishment, and that this should not depart from Judah till Shiloh came. But the text explaining *sceptre* by the word *lawgiver*, that the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh came, overthrows this interpretation, and shows the sceptre here mentioned to be meant of a sceptre of rule and government. Again, Joshua gave them rest from their enemies round about, and the land had rest many years under their judges; and David delivered them out of the hands of their enemies; and under Solomon they were the richest and happiest people upon earth; and frequently after they were in good condition and at ease: so that the sceptre of correction did often depart from them before Shiloh came. This is so evident, that others of them allow this sceptre to be a sceptre of government; but they say the meaning is, that the sceptre shall not finally or for ever depart from Judah, because the Messiah will come and restore it to Judah again. But this is adding to the text, and making a new text of it, and quite different from the former, nay, directly opposite to it; for the text speaks only of the departing of the sceptre, but nothing of the restoring it; and it cannot be restored till once it is departed: therefore this exposition, saying it "shall depart," and the text saying "shall not depart," are directly contrary.

Lastly, there are others who throw aside all these excuses, and say, that the sceptre or dominion is

not yet departed from Judah, for that some Jew or other may have some sort of rule or government, in some part or other of the world, though we know it not.

D. As if the Jews (who hold the best correspondence with one another of any people) could not tell this place, if there were any such, where they were governed by their own laws, and by governments of their own nation, though in subjection to the government of the country where they lived. These salvos of the Jews are contradictory to each other, they are poor excuses, and show their cause to be perfectly destitute. But I have an objection against this prophecy, which affects both Jews and Christians: that the regal sceptre did depart from the tribe of Judah long before your Shiloh came.

C. First, this prophecy does not call the sceptre a regal sceptre, and, therefore, denotes only government in the general.

Secondly, The whole land and the nation took their name from Judah. It was called the land of Judah, and the nation took the name of Jews from Judah, as before that of Hebrews from Heber their progenitor, Gen. x. 25. And this prophecy spoke of those times when Judah should be the father of his country, and the whole nation should be comprehended under the name of Judah; and therefore Judah holds the sceptre wherever a Jew governs.—Besides, the words *sceptre* and *throne* are used in relation to inferior governors, to tributary kings, and kings in captivity: thus it is said, that thirty-seven years after the captivity of Judah, the king of Babylon set the throne of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, above the thrones of kings that were with him in

Babylon, 2 Kings xxv. 27, 28. This was more than half the time of the captivity; and this was continued to Jehoiachin all the "days of his life," (ver. 29, 30.) which might last till the end, or near the end, of the captivity. But besides the king, the Jews had governors of their own nation allowed them, who were their archonites, or rulers, and they enjoyed their own laws, though in subjection to the king of Babylon. The elders of Judah (which was a name of government) are mentioned in the captivity, Ezek. viii. 1. and the chief of the fathers of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, Ezra i. 5. And after the captivity, they had a Tirshatha, or governor, of their own nation, Ezra ii. 63. Neh. viii. 9. And the throne, or the governor, is named, Neh. iii. 7. So that, here was still the throne or sceptre of Judah.

And from the time of the Maccabees to their conquest by the Romans, the supreme authority was in their High Priests; as it was afterwards, but in subjection to the Romans; and they enjoyed their own laws.—"Pilate said unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law," John xviii. 31. And though they answered, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death;" the reason is given in the next verse, "That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die." For crucifixion was a Roman death; but stoning, by the law of Moses, was the death for blasphemy, of which they accused him. And they afterwards stoned St. Stephen for the same (alleged) crime, according to their own law. Their High Priests and Council had full liberty to meet when

they pleased, and to act according to their law. And Christ himself owns they "sat in Moses' seat." The high priest sat to judge St. Paul, who applied to him that text, Exod. xxii. 28. "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people, or speak evil of him," as the Apostle renders it, Acts xxiii. 5. So that here the government was still in the Jews, though in subjection to the Romans: and thus it continued till the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans. But since that time they are dispersed in all countries, and have no governor or ruler of their own in any. The sceptre is entirely departed from them.

D. It is impossible but the Jews must see the difference of their state before the destruction of Jerusalem, and since, and of their condition, as to government, in their several captivities, and now in their dispersion. In the former, they had still a face of government left among themselves; but now none at all. And their excuses which you have mentioned, render them indeed self-condemned.

What do they say to that text you have quoted, Jer. xxxiii. 17, &c. that David should never want a son to sit upon his throne, &c.? You Christians apply it to Christ, who was called the Son of David: but to whom do the Jews apply it?

C. Some of them say, that David will be raised from the dead, and made immortal, to fulfil this prophecy. Others say, that after the Messiah, who is to be of the seed of David, he shall thenceforward no more want a son, &c.

D. Both these interpretations are in flat contradiction to the text. The text says, "Shall never

want;" these say, "Shall want for a long time;" they must confess now for near seventeen hundred years together, and how much longer they cannot tell. They have had none to sit in Moses' seat, or on the throne of David, though in subjection to their enemies, as they had in the worst of their captivities; but have not now in their dispersion.

But is there any difference betwixt what you call the cathedra, or seat of Moses, and the throne of David?

C. None as to government; for Moses was king in Jeshurun, Deut. xxxiii. 5. but David was the first king of the tribe of Judah, which was to be the name of the whole nation; and Christ was called the King of the Jews. It was the title set upon his cross. But after him none ever had that title to this day.

D. This is not to be answered by the Jews. But pray what person is it, do they say, was meant in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which you have quoted?

C. They will not have it to be any person at all; for they can find none, except our Christ, to whom these prophecies can any way be applied. Therefore, they say, it must be meant of the nation of the Jews, whose sufferings, &c. are there described in the name of a person, by which the people are to be understood.

D. But the people and the person there described as suffering, &c. are plainly contradistinguished. It is said, ver. 8. "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." And ver. 3, 6, &c. "We," (the people,) "like sheep, have gone astray: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," that

is, of the people, who are here called wicked. But he is called, "My righteous servant, who did no violence, neither was there any deceit in his mouth." Therefore, this people, and the person here spoken of, could not be the same. They are opposed to each other. The one called righteous, the other wicked. The one to die for the other, and to justify the other. "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many," &c.

C. The Jews, before Christ came, understood this prophecy of the Messiah, as indeed it can be applied to none other: but the Jews, since Christ, to avoid the force of this and other prophecies which speak of the sufferings and death of the Messiah, have invented two Messiahs; one Ben-Joseph, of the tribe of Ephraim, who is to be the suffering Messiah,—the other Ben-David, of the tribe of Judah, who is to triumph gloriously, and shall raise from the dead all the Israelites, and among them the first Messiah, Ben-Joseph.

D. Does the Scripture speak of two Messiahs, and the one raising the other?

C. No, not a word; but only of the Messiah, which shows it spoke only of one.—It mentions the twofold state of this Messiah, the first suffering, the second triumphing. Whence the modern Jews have framed to themselves these two Messiahs.

D. This is shameful! And plainly to avoid the prophecies against them.

C. This of Isaiah is fully explained, Dan ix. 24. &c. where it is said, that the Messiah the Prince should be cut off, but not for himself, but for the transgressions of the people: "To make an end of

sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity." And that this was to be within four hundred and ninety years after the building of the second temple, which I have mentioned before.

D. I cannot imagine how the Jews get clear of this.

C. They cannot. But in spite to it, they seek now to undervalue the whole book of Daniel, though they dare not totally reject it, because it was received by their forefathers, who preceded Christ. But, about a hundred years after Christ, they made a new distribution of the books of the Old Testament, different from their fathers, and took the book of Daniel out of the middle of the prophets, where it was placed before, and put it last of all. But more than this, to lessen the credit of this book, they adventured to shake the authority of their whole Scriptures; for they took upon them to make a distinction of the books of the Scripture, and made them not all inspired or canonical, but some of them they called "holy or pious books," though in a lower class than those called inspired or canonical Scriptures.—And they put the book of Daniel into the inferior class; but in that book Daniel speaks of himself as having received these prophecies immediately from an angel of God. Wherein, if he told us the truth, it must be put in the highest class of canonical Scripture; but if he told us false, then this book is quite through all a lie, and blasphemous too, in fathering it all upon God. So that the distinction of our modern Jews confounds themselves. And since they allow this book of Daniel a place among the "holy writings," they cannot deny it to be truly canonical, as all their

fathers owned it before the coming of Christ. And if they throw off Daniel, they must discard Ezekiel too: for he gives the highest attestation to Daniel that can be given to mortal man; he makes him one of the three most righteous men to be found in all ages, and the very standard of wisdom to the world, Ezek. xiv. 14, 20. xxviii. 3.

D. What do they say to Hag. ii. 7, 9. where it is said, that Christ was to come into the second temple?

C. Some of them say, that this must be meant of a temple yet to be built.

D. This is denying the prophecy; for it is said, ver. 7. "I will fill this house with glory," &c. And ver. 9. "The glory of this latter house—and in this place will I give peace," &c. but I am not to defend the cause of the Jews. It seems to me very desperate. I own you Christians have the advantage of them in this.

C. And I hope it will have so much effect with you, as to make you consider seriously of the weight of this argument of prophecy we have discoursed.

D. Let us at present leave this head of prophecy. Have you any further evidence to produce for your Christ?

VII. C. I have one more, which is yet more peculiar to him than even that of prophecy. For whatever weak pretence may be made of some prophecies among the heathen, as to some particular events of little consequence to the world, yet they never offered at that sort of evidence I am next to produce; which is not only prophecies of the fact, and that from the beginning of the world, but also

types, resemblances, and exhibitions of the fact, in outward sensible institutions, ordained as law from the beginning, and to continue till the fact they prefigured should come to pass.

Such were the sacrifices instituted by God immediately upon the fall, (and upon his promise of the life-giving seed, Gen. iii. 15.) as types of that great and only propitiatory sacrifice for sin which was to come; whose blood they saw continually shed (in type) in their daily sacrifices.

These were continued in the heathen posterities of Adam, by immemorial tradition, from the beginning, though they had forgot the beginning of them, as they had of the world, or of mankind; yet they retained so much of the reason of them, as that they had universally the notion of a vicarious atonement, and that our sins were to be purged by the blood of others suffering in our stead. As likewise, that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, but that a more noble blood was necessary. Hence they came to human sacrifices, and at last to sacrifice the greatest, most noble, and most virtuous: and such offered themselves to be sacrificed for the safety of the people. As Codrus, king of the Athenians, who sacrificed himself on this account. The like did Curtius for the Romans, as supposing himself the bravest and most valuable of them all. So the Decii, the Fabii, &c. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia for the Greek army; and the king of Moab sacrificed his eldest son, that should have reigned in his stead, 2 Kings iii. 27. Thus the sacrificing (not their servants or slaves, but) their children to Moloch, is frequently mentioned of the

Jews, which they did in imitation of the heathen, as it is said, Psal. cvi. 35—38. "They were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works; and they served their idols—Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto the idols of Canaan," &c. Pursuant to which notion, the prophet introduceth them arguing thus: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" They were plainly searching after a complete and adequate satisfaction for sin; and they thought it necessary.

D. No doubt they thought so; but that did not make it necessary.

C. The doctrine of satisfaction is a subject by itself, which I have treated elsewhere, in my answer to the examination of my last dialogue against the Socinians. But I am not come so far with you yet; I am now only speaking of sacrifices as types of the sacrifice of Christ.

And besides sacrifice in general, there were afterwards some particular sacrifices appointed, more nearly expressive of our redemption by Christ. As the passover, which was instituted in memory of the redemption of the children of Israel (that is, the church,) out of Egypt, (the house of bondage of this world, where we are in servitude to sin and misery,) in the night when God slew all the first-born of the Egyptians: but the destroyer was to pass over those

houses where he saw the blood of the Paschal Lamb upon the door-posts. And it was to be eaten with unleavened bread, expressing the sincerity of the heart, without any mixture or taint of wickedness. And thus it is applied, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

There was a double exhibition of Christ on the great day of expiation, which was but once a year; on which day only the High Priest entered into the holy of holies (which represented heaven, Exod. xxv. 40. Heb. ix. 24.) with the blood of the sacrifice, whose body was burned without the camp; to show God's detestation of sin, and that it was to be removed far from us: and that we must go out of the camp, that is, out of this world, bearing our reproach for sin, before we can be quite freed from it. See how exactly this was fulfilled in Christ, Heb. xiii. 11—14. "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the High Priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach; for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

The other lively representation of Christ's bearing our sins, and taking them away from us, which was made on the same day of expiation, was the

scape-goat, Lev. xvi. 21, 22. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." This is so plain, that it needs no application.

Another express representation of Christ was the brazen serpent in the wilderness, by looking upon which the people were cured of the stings of the fiery serpents. So, in looking upon Christ by faith, the sting of the old serpent, the devil, is taken away. And the lifting up the serpent did represent Christ being lifted up upon the cross. Christ himself makes the allusion, John iii. 14. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

He was likewise represented by the manna; for he was the true bread that came down from heaven to nourish us unto eternal life, John vi. 31—36.

As also by the rock whence the waters flowed out to give them drink in the wilderness, "and that Rock was Christ," 1 Cor. x. 4.

And he was not only their meat and drink, but he was also their constant guide, and led them in a pillar of fire by night, and of a cloud by day. And the cloud of glory in the temple, in which God appeared, was by the Jews understood as a type of the Messiah, who is the true Shechina, or habitation of God.

The Sabbath is called a shadow of Christ, Col. ii. 17. It was a figure of that eternal rest procured to us by Christ; therefore it is called a sign of the perpetual covenant, Exod. xxxi. 16, 17. Ezek. xx. 12.

And such a sign was the Temple at Jerusalem, at which place, and none other, the sacrifices of the Jews were to be offered, Deut. xii. 11, 13, 14. Because Christ was to be sacrificed there, and as a token of it, those sacrifices which were types of him were to be offered only there. And so great stress was laid upon this, that no sin of the Jews is oftener remembered than their breach of this command. It was a blot set upon their several reformations, otherwise good and commendable in the sight of God, that the high places (where they used to sacrifice) were not taken away. This is marked as the great defect in the reformation of Asa, 1 Kings xv. 14. of Jehoshaphat, 1 Kings xxii. 43. of Jehoash, 2 Kings xii. 3. of Amaziah, 2 Kings xv. 4. of Jotham, ver. 35. But they were taken away by Hezekiah, 2 Kings xviii. 4. and the people instructed to sacrifice and burn incense at Jerusalem only, 2 Chron. xxxii. 12. Isa. xxxvi. 7.

There was likewise a further design of Providence in limiting their sacrifices to Jerusalem, which was, that after the great propitiatory sacrifice of Christ had been once offered there, God was to remove the Jews from Jerusalem, that they might have no sacrifice at all (as, for that reason, they have not had in any part of the world near these seventeen hundred years past) to instruct them. That (as the Apostle speaks to them, Heb. x. 26.) "there remaineth no more"

(or other) "sacrifice for sins." And since by the law their sins were to be purged by sacrifice, they have now no way to purge their sins; to force them (as it were) to look back upon that only sacrifice which can purge their sins. And till they return to that, they must have no sacrifice at all, but die in their sins. As Jesus said unto them, "I go my way, and ye shall die in your sins.—For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

And Daniel prophesied expressly, that soon after the death of the Messiah, the city of Jerusalem and the sanctuary should be destroyed, and that the sacrifice should cease, "even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate," Dan. ix. 26, 27.

And this desolation of theirs, and what was determined upon them, was told them likewise by Hosea, chap. iii. 4. "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a sacrifice." But he says, in the next verse, that "in the latter days they shall return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their King;" that is, the Son of David, their Prince and Messiah. As he is called Messiah the Prince, Dan. ix. 25.

Thus, as salvation was of the Jews, because Christ was to come of them, so this salvation was only to be had at Jerusalem, where he was to suffer, and by which only salvation was to be had.

D. This argument is to the Jews; and if I were a Jew it would move me, because they never were so long before without king, temple, or sacrifice.

C. But the prophecies of it, and these fulfilled as you have seen; and Christ being so plainly pointed

at, and the place of his passion, by limiting the sacrifices to Jerusalem only; and by causing the legal sacrifices to cease throughout the world, to show that they were fulfilled: all this is a strong evidence to you of the truth of these things, and of our Jesus being the Messiah, or Christ, who was prophesied of.

D. I cannot deny but there is something remarkable in this, which I will take time to consider. But I do not see how the Jews can stand out against this; because this mark, given by Daniel, of the Messiah, that soon after his death the sacrifice should cease, cannot agree to any after-Messiah, who should now come so many ages after the sacrifice has ceased.

C. Since we have fallen into the subject of the Jews, I will give you another prophecy, which cannot be fulfilled in any after-Messiah whom the Jews expect. And it will be also a confirmation to you of the truth of the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures. Thus God speaks, Jer. xxxiii. 20—22. "Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me." Now let the Jews tell in which Son of David this is fulfilled, except only in our Christ. And how this is made good to the priests and Levites, otherwise than as Isaiah pro-

phesied, chap. lxvi. 21. "And I will also take of them" (the Gentiles) "for priests, and for Levites, saith the Lord." And as it is thus applied, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9. and Rev. i. 6. And this evangelical priesthood is multiplied as the stars of heaven, (which they are frequently called,) not like the tribe of Levi, who could not afford priests to all the earth.

And as I said before of Jerusalem and the sacrifices there, that they are ceased, to show they are fulfilled, so here, after the Son of David was come, all his other sons ceased, and the very genealogy of their tribes, and so of Judah, is lost, as also of the tribe of Levi: so that the Jews can never tell, if any after-Messiah should appear, whether he were of the tribe of Judah, far less whether he were of the lineage of David; nor can they show the genealogy of any they call Levites now among them.

This is occasioned by their being dispersed among all nations, and yet preserved a distinct people from all the earth, though without any country of their own, or king, or priest, or temple, or sacrifice. And they are thus preserved, by the providence of God, (so as never any nation was since the foundation of the world,) to show the fulfilling of the prophecies concerning them, and the judgments pronounced against them for their crucifying their Messiah; and that their conversion may be more apparent to the world, and their being gathered out of all nations, and restored to Jerusalem, (as is promised them,) when they shall come to acknowledge their Messiah.

And God not permitting them to have any king or governor upon earth, ever since their last dispersion by the Romans, (lest they might say, that the

sceptre was not departed from Judah, is to convince them (when God shall take the veil off their heart) that no other Messiah who can come hereafter can answer this prophecy of Jeremiah, or that of Jacob, that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh came.

And it is wonderful to consider, how expressly their present state is prophesied of, that it could not be more literal, if it were to be worded now by us who see it: as that they should be scattered into all countries, sifted as with a sieve among all nations, yet preserved a people; and that God would make an utter end of those nations who had oppressed them, and blot out their names from under heaven, (as we have seen it fulfilled upon the great empires of the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Romans, who, one after the other, had miserably wasted the Jews); but that the name of the Jews (the fewest and poorest of all nations,) should remain for ever, and they a people distinct from all the nations in the world, though scattered among them all. Read the prophecies express upon this point, Jer. xxx. 11. xxxi. 36, 37. xxxiii. 24—26. xlvi. 28. Isaiah xxvii. 7. xxix. 7, 8. liv. 9, 10. lxv. 8. Ezek. vi. 8. xi. 16, 17. xii. 15, 16. Amos ix. 8, 9. Zech. x. 9. And it was foretold them long before that thus it would be, Lev. xxvi. 44. and this "in the latter days," Deut. iv. 27, 30, 31. Thus Moses told them of it so long before, as the after-prophets frequently; and you see all these prophecies literally fulfilled and fulfilling. The like cannot be said of any other nation that ever was upon the earth! So destroyed, and so preserved! And for so long a time! Having worn

out all the great empires of the world, and still surviving them! To fulfil what was further prophesied of them to the end of the world.

D. I cannot say but there is something very surprising in this: I never thought of it before. It is a living prophecy, which we see fulfilled and still fulfilling at this day before our eyes. For we are sure these prophecies were not coined yesterday; and they are as express and particular as if they were to be written now, after the events are so far come to pass.

C. As the door was kept open to Christ before he came, by the many and flagrant prophecies of him, and by the types representing him, so the door was ever shut after him, by those prophecies being all fulfilled and completed in him, and applicable to none who should come after him; and by all the types ceasing, the shadows vanishing when the substance was come. No Messiah can come now, before the sceptre depart from Judah, and the sacrifice from Jerusalem. Before the sons of David (all except Christ) shall cease to sit upon his throne, none can come now, within four hundred and ninety years of the building of the second temple, nor come into that very temple, as, I have before showed, was expressly prophesied by Daniel and Haggai.

D. I know not what the Jews can say, who own these prophecies.

C. They say, that the coming of the Messiah at the time spoken of in the Prophets, has been delayed because of their sins.

D. Then it may be delayed for ever, unless they can tell us when they will grow better. But, how-

ever, these prophecies have failed which spoke of the time of the Messiah's coming; and they can never be a proof hereafter, because the time is past. So that, according to this, they were made for no purpose, unless to show that they were false; that is, no prophecies at all!

But were these prophecies upon condition? Or was it said that the coming of the Messiah should be delayed if the Jews were sinful?

C. No: so far from it, that it was expressly prophesied that the coming of the Messiah should be in the most sinful state of the Jews, and to purge their sins, Dan. ix. 24. Zech. xiii. 1. And the ancient tradition of the Jews was pursuant to this, that at the coming of the Messiah the temple should be a den of thieves. *Rabbi Juda in Masoreta.* And a time of great corruption. Talmud. tit. de Synedrio, and de Ponderibus, &c.

But more than this, the very case is put of their being most sinful, and it is expressly said, that this should not hinder the fulfilling of the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, spoken of as the Son of David, 2 Sam. vii. 14—16. Psal. lxxxix. 30, 33—37. But it was prophesied that they should not know their Messiah, and should reject him when he came; that he should be a "stone of stumbling," and a "rock of offence," to them, Isaiah viii. 14, 15. And that "their eyes should be closed," that they should not understand their own prophets, chap. xxix. 9—11. That their builders should reject the head-stone of their corner, Psal. cxviii. 22. And the like in several other places of their own prophets. And thus they mistook the prophecy concerning the

coming of Elias, whom it is said they knew not, "but did to him what they listed," and so the same of Christ, Matt. xvii. 12. And it is said, 1 Cor. ii. 8. that "had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

D. This indeed solves the prophecies, both those of the coming of the Messiah, and of the Jews not knowing him, and therefore rejecting him; and likewise obviates this excuse of theirs: for if they were very sinful at that time, it was a greater punishment of their sin not to know, and to reject their Messiah, than his not coming at that time would have been.

C. The great sin mentioned for which they were punished by several captivities, was their idolatry, the last and longest of which captivities was that of seventy years in Babylon; since which time they have forsaken their idolatry, and have never been nationally guilty of it since, but always had it in the utmost abhorrence. But since their rejecting their Messiah, they have been now near seventeen hundred years, not in a captivity, where they might be all together, and enjoying their own law, government, and worship, in some manner, but dispersed over all the world, without country of their own, or king, or priest, or temple, or sacrifice, or any prophet to comfort them, or give them hopes of a restoration; and all this came upon them, not for their old sin of idolatry, but from that curse they imprecated upon themselves, when they crucified their Messiah, saying, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Which cleaves unto them from that day to this, and is visible to all the world but to themselves. And what other sin can they think

greater than idolatry, for which they have been punished so much more terribly than for all their idolatries; what other sin can this be, but their crucifying the Messiah! And here they may see their sinful state, which they allege as an excuse for their Messiah's not coming at the time foretold by the prophets, rendered tenfold more sinful by their rejecting him when he came.

D. This is a full answer, and convincing as to the Jews. But have you any more to say to me?

C. I have one thing more to offer, which may come under this head of types, and that is, persons who represented Christ in several particulars, and so might be called personal types. And I will not apply these out of my own head, but as they are applied in the New Testament, which, having all the marks of the Old Testament, and stronger evidence than these, in those marks we are now upon, their authority is indisputable.

I begin with Adam, who gave us life and death too; and Christ came, by his death, to restore us to life again, even to life eternal. Hence Christ is called the second Adam, and Adam is called the figure of Christ. The parallel betwixt them is insisted on, Rom. v. 12. to the end, and 1 Cor. xv. 45—50. Eve received her life from Adam, the church from Christ. She was taken out of the side of Adam when he was in a dead sleep; and after Christ was dead, the sacraments of water and blood flowed out of his side, that is, Baptism, whereby we are born into Christ, and the Sacrament of his Blood, whereby we are nourished into eternal life.

Enoch was carried up bodily into heaven; as

Elijah. One under the patriarchal, the other under the legal dispensation. In both, the ascension of Christ was prefigured.

Noah, a preacher of righteousness to the old world, and father of the new. Who saved the church by water, the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, 1 Pet. iii. 20, 21.

Melchisedec, that is, King of Righteousness, and King of Peace, and Priest of the Most High God; who was made like unto the Son of God; a priest continually, Heb. vii. 1—3.

Abraham, the friend of God, and Father of the Faithful, the heir of the world, Rom. iv. 13. In whom all the nations of the earth are blessed, Gen. xviii. 18.

Isaac, the heir of this promise, was born after his father and mother were both past the age of generation in the course of nature, Gen. xvii. 17. xviii. 11. Rom. iv. 19. Heb. xi. 11, 12. The nearest type that could be to the generation of Christ, wholly without a man.

And his sacrifice had a very near resemblance to the sacrifice and death of Christ, who lay three days in the grave, and Isaac was three days a dead man (as we say in the law) under the sentence of death, Gen. xxii. 4. whence Abraham received him, in a figure, Heb. xi. 19. that is, of the resurrection of Christ. And Abraham was commanded to go three days' journey to sacrifice Isaac upon the same mountain (according to the ancients) where Christ was crucified, and where Adam was buried. Again, the common epithet of Christ, that is, "the only begotten of the Father, and his beloved Son," were

both given to Isaac, Gen. xxii. 2. Heb. xi. 17. For he was the only son that was begotten in that miraculous manner, after both his parents were decayed by nature. And he was the only son of the promise, which was not made to the seed of Abraham in general, but "in Isaac shall thy seed be called," Gen. xxi. 12. "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ," Gal. iii. 16.

And as Isaac, which signifies, 'rejoicing,' or 'laughing for joy,' was thus the only begotten of his parents, so Abram signifies, 'the glorious father,' and Abraham (into which his name was changed on the promise of Isaac, Gen. xvii. 5, 16.) signifies, 'the father of a multitude,' to express the coming in of the Gentiles to Christ, and the increase of the Gospel; whence it is there said to Abraham, "A father of many nations have I made thee, and in thy seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

Isaac, who was born by promise of a free woman, represented the Christian church, in opposition to Ishmael, who was born after the flesh, of a bond-maid, and signified the Jewish church under the law. See this allegory carried on, Gal. iv. 21. to the end.

Jacob, in his vision of the ladder, (Gen. xxviii. 12.) shows the intercourse which was opened by Christ betwixt heaven and earth, by his making peace; and to this he alludes, when he says, "Hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man," John i. 51. And Jacob's wrestling with the angel, (Gen. xxxii. 24. &c. Hos. xii. 4.) and, as it were, prevailing over him, by force, to bless him, shows the strong

and powerful intercession of Christ; whereby (as he words it, Matt. xi. 12.) "Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Whence the name of Jacob was then turned to Israel, that is, one who prevails upon God, or has power over him; God representing himself here as overcome by us: and the name of Israel was ever after given to the church. But much more so when Christ came, as he said, Matt. xi. 12. "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," &c. that is, from the first promulgation of Christ being come. Thenceforward the Gentiles began to press into the Gospel, and as by force to take it from the Jews. This was signified in the name Jacob, that is, a supplanter, for the Gentiles here supplanted their elder brother the Jews, and stole the blessing and heirship from them.

Joseph was sold by his brethren out of envy; but it proved the preservation of them and all their families: and Christ was sold by his brethren out of envy, Mark xv. 10. which proved the means of their redemption: and Christ, as Joseph, became Lord over his brethren.

Moses calls Christ a Prophet like unto himself, Deut. xviii. 18. He represented Christ the great Lawgiver; and his delivering Israel out of Egypt, was a type of Christ's delivering his church from the bondage of sin and hell.

Joshua, called also Jesus, Heb. iv. 8. overcame all the enemies of Israel, and gave them possession of the Holy Land, which was a type of heaven: and Christ appeared to Joshua, as Captain of the Host of the Lord, Josh. v. 14. So that Joshua was his Lieutenant, representing him.

Samson, who, by his single valour and his own strength, overcame the Philistines, and slew more at his death than in all his life, was a representation of Christ, who "trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with him, but his own arm brought him salvation," Isaiah lxiii. 3, 5. But his death completed his victory, whereby he overcame all the power of the enemy, "and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross."

David, whose Son Christ is called, speaks frequently of him in his own person, and in events which cannot be applied to David, as Psal. xvi. 10. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thine Holy One to see corruption;" for David has seen corruption. Christ is said to sit upon the throne of David, Isaiah ix. 7. And Christ is called by the name of David, Hos. iii. 5. and frequently in the Prophets. David from a shepherd became a King and a Prophet, denoting the threefold office of Christ, pastoral, regal, and prophetical.

Solomon, the wisest of men, his peaceable and magnificent reign represented the triumphal state of Christ's kingdom, which is described, Psal. lxxii. inscribed for Solomon, there called the king's son, but far exceeding the glory of his reign, or what can possibly be applied to him, as ver. 5, 8, 11, 17. But his reign came the nearest of any to that universal and glorious reign there described, particularly in his being chosen to build the temple, because he was a man of peace, and had shed no blood, like David his father, who conquered the enemies of Israel, but Solomon built the Church in full peace;

and as it is particularly set down, 1 Kings vi. 7. and no doubt he was ordered by God so to do, that "the house, when it was building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was building." Which did denote that the Church of Christ was to be built, not only in peace, but without noise or confusion, as Isaiah prophesied of him, chap. xlii. 2. "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break," &c. He was not to conquer with the sword, as the Israelites subdued Canaan, but to overcome by meekness, and doing good to his enemies, and patiently suffering all injuries from them. And so he taught his followers, as St. Paul says, 2 Tim. ii. 24. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men.—In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves," &c.

And I cannot think but there was some imitation of this peaceable temple of Solomon, in the temple of Janus among the Romans; for that was never to be shut but in time of peace; which happened rarely among them, but three times in all their history. The last was in the reign of Augustus, in which time Christ came into the world, when there was a profound and universal peace: and so it became the Prince of Peace, whose birth was thus proclaimed by the angels, Luke ii. 14. "Glory to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Jonah's being three days and nights in the belly of the whale, was a sign of Christ's being so long

in the heart of the earth. Christ himself makes the allusion, Matt. xii. 40.

But as there were several persons, at several times, representing and prefiguring several particulars of the life and death of Christ, so there was one standing and continual representation of him appointed in the person of the High Priest under the law; who, entering into the holy of holies once a year, with the blood of the great expiatory sacrifice, and he only, to make atonement for sin, did lively represent our great High Priest entering heaven, once for all, with his own blood, to expiate the sins of the whole world. This is largely insisted upon in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chap. vii. viii. ix. x.

And our deliverance by the death of Christ is represented, as in a picture, in that ordinance of the law, that the man-slayer, who fled to one of the cities of refuge, (which were all of the cities of the Levites) should not come out thence till the death of the high priest, and no satisfaction be taken till then, and then he should be acquitted and "return into the land of his possession," Numb. xxxv. 6, 25—28.

And I doubt not but the Gentiles had from hence their *asyla*, or temples of refuge for criminals.

D. There is a resemblance in these things; but I would not have admitted them as proof, if you had not supported them, at least most of them, with the authority of the New Testament. And it was not necessary that every one should be named in it; for those that are named are only occasionally; and I must take time to consider of the evidences you have brought for the authority of the New Testa-

ment, which you have made full as great, if not greater, than the evidences for the Old Testament.

C. I may say greater upon this head of prophecies and types, because there are no proofs till they are fulfilled; though then they prove the truth of these prophecies and types; and so the one confirms the other: but the whole evidence of the law is not made apparent, till we see it fulfilled in the Gospel. For which reason I call the Gospel the strongest proof, not only as to itself, but likewise as to the law; and the Jews, as much as in them lies, have invalidated this strongest proof for the Old Testament, which is the fulfilling of it in the New. Nay, they have rendered these prophecies false, which, they say, were not fulfilled at the time they spake of, and never now can be fulfilled. And as no fact but that of our Christ alone ever had his evidence of prophecies and types from the beginning, so never can any other fact have it now, while the world lasts.

D. Why do you say, never can have it? For may not God make what fact he pleases, and give it what evidence he pleases?

C. But it cannot have the evidence that the fact of Christ has, unless at that distance of time hereafter, as from the beginning of the world to this day. Because God took care that the evidence of Christ should commence from the very beginning, in the promise of him made to Adam, and to be renewed by the prophets in all the after-ages, till he should come: and the evidence of him after his coming, (in which I have instanced,) and which continues to this day, before it can belong to any other,

must have the same compass of time that has gone to confirm this evidence, else it has not the same evidence.

D. By this argument the evidence grows stronger the longer it continues, since you say, that the prophecies of the Scriptures reach to the end of the world, and so will be further and further fulfilling every day. This is contrary to what one of your doctors has lately advanced, who pretends to calculate the age of evidences,* that in such a time they decay, and in such a time must die. And that the evidence of Christianity having lasted so long, is upon the decay, and must wear out soon, if not supplied by some fresh and new evidence.

C. This may be true as to fables, which have no foundation: but is that prophecy I mentioned to you of the dispersion, and yet wonderful preservation of the Jews, less evident to you, because it was made so long ago?

D. No. It is much more evident for that. If I had lived at the time when those prophecies were made, I fancy I should not have believed one word of them; but wondered at the assurance of those who ventured to foretell such improbable and almost impossible things. And I should have thought the same of what you told me of your Christ, foretelling the progress of his Gospel, at the first so very slender appearance of it, and by such weak and improbable means, as only suffering and dying for it, which to me would have seemed perfect despair, and a giving up of the cause. I should have thought

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* Craig, Theologiæ Christianæ Principia Mathematica, 1699.

of them (as of others) who prophecy of things after their time, that they might not be contradicted while they lived. But my seeing so much of these prophecies concerning the Jews, and the progress of the Gospel, come to pass so long time after, is the only thing that makes me lay stress upon them, and which makes them seem wonderful to me.

C. When the Prophecies shall all be fully completed at the end of the world, they will then seem strongest of all; they will then be undeniable; when Christ shall visibly descend from heaven (in the same manner as he ascended,) to execute both what he has promised and threatened. And in the meantime, the prophecies lose none of their force, but their evidence increases, as "the light shineth more and more, unto the perfect day."

VIII. D. I observe you have made no use of that common topic, of the truth and sincerity of those penmen of the Scriptures, and what interest they could have in setting up these things if they had been false; for this can amount, at most, but to a probability: and you having produced those evidences which you think infallible, it might seem a lessening of your proof to insist upon bare probabilities; so that I suppose you give that up.

C. No, Sir, I give it not up, though I have not made it the chief foundation of my argument; and if it were but a probability, it wants not its force; for it is thought unreasonable to deny a flagrant probability, where there is not as strong a probability on the other side, for then that makes a doubt: but otherwise, men generally are satisfied with probabilities, for that is the greatest part of our knowledge. If we will believe nothing but what

carries an infallible demonstration along with it, we must be sceptics in most things of the world: and such were never thought the wisest men.

But besides, a probability may be sooner discerned by some than the infallibility of a demonstration; therefore we must not lay aside probabilities. But in this case, I think there is an infallible assurance, as infallible as the senses of all mankind; and I suppose you will not ask a greater.

D. How can you say that? When the suffering of afflictions, and death itself, is but a probability of the truth of what is told us: because some have suffered death for errors.

C. But then they thought them true; and men may be deceived in their judgments: we see many examples of it. But if the facts related be such, as that it is impossible for those who tell them to be imposed upon themselves, or for those to whom they are told to believe them, if not true, without supposing a universal deception of the senses of mankind, then I hope I have brought the case up to that infallible demonstration I promised: and this is the case of the facts related in Holy Scripture. They were told by those who saw them, and did them, and they were told to those who saw them likewise themselves: and the relators appealed to this: so that here could be no deceit.

D. I grant there is a great difference between errors in opinion, and in fact; and that such facts as are told of Moses and of Christ could not have passed upon the people then alive, and who were said to have seen them. And I find that both Moses, Christ, and the Apostles, did appeal to what the people they spoke to had seen themselves.

C. With this consideration, their patient suffering, even unto death, for the truth of what they taught, will be a full demonstration of the truth of it. Add to this, that their enemies who persecuted them, the Romans, as well as Jews, to whom they appealed as witnesses of the facts, did not offer to deny them. That none of the apostates from Christianity did attempt to detect any falsehood in the facts; though they might have had great rewards if they could have done it; the Roman emperors being then persecutors of Christianity, and for three hundred years after Christ. And Julian the Emperor, afterwards turned apostate, who had been initiated in the *sacra* of Christianity, yet could not he detect any of the facts. And it was a particular providence for the further evidence of Christianity, that all the civil governments in the world were against it for the first three hundred years, lest it might be said, (as it is ridiculously in your Amintor) that the awe of the civil government might hinder those who could make the detection.

Now, Sir, to apply all that we have said, I desire you would compare these evidences I have brought for Christianity, with those that are pleaded for any other religion.

There are but four in the world, viz. Christianity, Judaism, Heathenism, and Mahometanism.

Christianity was the first; for from the first promise of Christ made to Adam, during the patriarchal and legal dispensations, all was Christianity in type, as I have showed.

And as to Moses and the law, the Jews can give no evidence for that, which will not equally establish

the truth of Christ and the Gospel. Nor can they disprove the facts of Christ by any topic, which will not likewise disprove all those of Moses and the prophets. So that they are hedged in on every side: they must either renounce Moses, or acknowledge Christ.

Moses and the law have the first five evidences, but they have not the sixth and the seventh, which are the strongest. This is as to Judaism before Christ came; but since, as it now stands in opposition to Christianity, in favour of any future Messiah, it has none of the evidences at all. On the contrary, their own prophecies and types make against them; for their prophecies are fulfilled, and their types are ceased, and cannot belong to any other Messiah who should come hereafter. They stand now more naked than the Heathens or the Mahometans.

Next for Heathenism, some of the facts recorded of their gods have the first and second evidences, and some the third, but not one of them the fourth, or any of the other evidences.

But truly and properly speaking, and if we will take the opinion of the Heathens themselves, they were no facts at all, but mythological fables, invented to express some moral virtues or vices; or the history of nature, and power of the elements, &c. As likewise to turn great part of the history of the Old Testament into fable, and make it their own, for they disdained to borrow from the Jews. They made gods of men, and the most vicious too; insomuch that some of their wise men thought it a corruption of youth to read the history of their gods,

whom they represented as notorious liars, thieves, adulterers, &c. though they had some mythology hid under all that.

And as men were their gods, so they made the first man to be father of the gods, and called him Saturn, not begot by any man, but the son of Cœlus and Vesta; that is, of heaven and earth. And his maiming his father with a steel scythe, was to show how heaven itself is impaired by Time, whom they painted with wings and a scythe, mowing down all things. And Saturn eating up his own children, was only to express how Time devours all its own productions: and his being deposed by Jupiter his son, shows, that Time, which wears away all other things, is worn away itself at last.

Several of the heathen authors have given us the mythology of their gods, with which I will not detain you. They expressed every thing, and worshipped every thing under the name of a god, as the god of sleep, of music, of eloquence, of hunting, drinking, love, war, &c. They had above thirty thousand of them; and in what they told of them, and as they described them, they often traced the sacred story.

Ovid begins his Metamorphoses with a perfect poetical version of the beginning of Genesis: *Ante Mare et Tellus.*—Then goes on with the history of the creation; the formation of man out of the dust of the earth, and being made after the image of God, and to have dominion over the inferior creatures. Then he tells of the general corruption, and the giants before the flood, when the earth was filled with violence; for which all mankind, with the beasts

and the fowl, were destroyed by the universal deluge, except only Deucalion and Pyrrha his wife, who were saved in a boat, which landed them on the top of Mount Parnassus; and that from these two the whole earth was re-peopled. I think it will be needless to detain the reader with an application of this to the history of the creation set down by Moses, of the flood, and the ark wherein Noah was saved, and the earth re-peopled by him, &c.

And Noah was plainly intended likewise in their god Janus, with his two faces, one old, looking backward to the old world that was destroyed; the other young, looking forward to the new world that was to spring from him. So that even their turning the sacred history into a fable, is a confirmation of it. And there can be no comparison betwixt the truths of the facts so attested, as I have showed, and the fables that were made from them.

Lastly, as to the Mahometan religion, it wants all the evidences we have mentioned; for there was no miracle said to be done by Mahomet, publicly and in the face of the world, but that only of conquering with the sword. Who saw his Mesra, or Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, and thence to heaven in one night, and back in bed with his wife in the morning? Who was present and heard the conversation the moon had with him in his cave? It is not said there was any witness. And the Koran, c. vi. excuses his not working any miracles to prove his mission. They say that Moses and Christ came to show the clemency and goodness of God, to which miracles were necessary; but that Mahomet came to show the power of God, to which no miracle was needful but that of the sword.

And his Koran is a rhapsody of stuff, without head or tail, one would think written by a madman, with ridiculous titles, as the chapter of the Cow, of the Spider, &c. And their legends are much more senseless than those of the Papists; as of an angel, the distance betwixt whose two hands is seventy thousand days' journey. Of a cow's head with horns, which have forty thousand knots, and forty days' journey betwixt each knot: and others, which have seventy mouths, and every mouth seventy tongues, and each tongue praises God seventy times a-day, in seventy different idioms. And of wax candles before the throne of God, which are fifty years' journey from one end to the other. The Koran says, the earth was created in two days, and is supported by an ox, which stands under it, upon a white stone, with his head to the east, and his tail to the west, having forty horns, and as great a distance betwixt every horn as a man could walk in a thousand years' time. Then their description of heaven is a full enjoyment of wine, women, and other like gross sensual pleasures.

When you compare this with our Holy Scriptures, you will need no argument to make you see the difference. The heathen orators have admired the sublime of the style of our Scriptures; no writing in the world comes near it, even with all the disadvantage of our translation, which being obliged to be literal, must lose much of the beauty of it. The plainness and succinctness of the historical part, the melody of the Psalms, the instruction of the Proverbs, the majesty of the Prophets, and above all, that easy sweetness in the New Testament, where

the glory of heaven is set forth in a grave and moving expression, which yet reaches not the height of the subject; not like the flights of rhetoric, which set out small matters in great words. But the Holy Scriptures touch the heart, raise expectation, confirm our hope, strengthen our faith, give peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which is inexpressible. All which you will experience when you once come to believe; you will then bring forth these fruits of the Spirit, when you receive the word with pure affection, as we pray in our Litany.

But, Sir, if there is truth in the Koran, then the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God; for the Koran says so, and that it was sent to confirm them, even the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament; and it expressly owns our Jesus to be the Messiah. At the end of the fourth chapter it has these words: "The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, is a Prophet, and an Angel of God, his Word and his Spirit, which he sent to Mary." But it gives him not the name of the Son of God, for this wise reason, chap. vi. "How shall God have a son, who hath no wives?" Yet it owns Jesus to be born of a pure virgin, without a man, by the operation of the Spirit of God. And in the same chapter this Mahomet acknowledges his own ignorance, and says, "I told you not that I had in my power all the treasures of God, neither that I had knowledge of the future and past, nor do affirm that I am an Angel: I only act what hath been inspired into me: is the blind like him that seeth clearly?" And after says, "I am not your tutor, every thing hath its time, you shall hereafter understand the truth."

This is putting off, and bidding them expect some other after Mahomet. But our Jesus said, he was our tutor and teacher, and that there was none to come after him. Mahomet said he was no Angel, but that Jesus was an Angel of God. But when God bringeth Jesus into the world, he saith, "Let all the Angels of God worship him." And he made him Lord of all the Angels. Mahomet knew not what was past or to come; but our Jesus knew all things, and what was in the heart of every man, which none can do, but God only; and foretold things to come to the end of the world. Mahomet had not all the treasures of God: but in Jesus are hid "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.—For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

Again, Mahomet never called himself, the Messiah, or the Word, or Spirit of God, yet all these appellations he gives to our Jesus. There were prophecies of Jesus, which we have seen: were there any of Mahomet?—None; except of the "false Christs and false Prophets," which Jesus told should come after him, and bid us beware of them, for that they should deceive many.

D. But if Mahomet gave thus the preference to Christ in every thing, and said that his Koran was only a confirmation of the Gospel; how came he to set it up against the Gospel, and to reckon the Christians among the unbelievers?

C. No otherwise than as other heretics did who called themselves the only true Christians, and invented new interpretations of the Scriptures. The Socinians now charge the whole of Christianity with

apostacy, idolatry, and polytheism: and the Koran is but a system of the old Arianism, ill digested, and worse put together, with a mixture of some Heathenism and Judaism; for Mahomet's father was a Heathen, his mother a Jewess, and his tutor was Sergius the Monk, a Nestorian; which sect was a branch of Arianism: these, crudely mixed, made up the farrago of the Koran; but the prevailing part was Arianism; and where that spread itself in the East, there Mahometanism succeeded, and sprung out of it, to let all Christians see the horror of that heresy! And our Socinians, now among us, who call themselves Unitarians, are much more Mahometans than Christians. For except some personal things as to Mahomet, they agree almost wholly in his doctrine; and as such addressed themselves to the Morocco ambassador here, in the reign of King Charles II. as you may see in the preface to my Dialogues against the Socinians, printed in the year 1708. Nor do they speak more honourably of Christ and the Holy Scriptures than the Koran does: and there is no error concerning Christ in the Koran, but what was broached before by the heretics of Christianity; as that Christ did not suffer really, but in appearance only, or that some other was crucified in his stead, but he taken up into heaven as the Koran speaks.

So that in strictness, I should not have reckoned Mahometanism as one of the four religions in the world, but as one of the heresies of Christianity. But because of its great name, and its having spread so far in the world, by the conquests of Mahomet and his followers, and that it is vulgarly understood to be a distinct religion by itself, therefore I have

considered it as such. And as to your concern in the matter, you see plainly, that the Koran comes in attestation and confirmation of the facts of Christ, and of the Holy Scriptures.

D. I am not come yet so far as to enter into the disputes of the several sects of Christianity, but as to the fact of Christ and of the Scriptures in general, Mahometanism, I see, does rather confirm than oppose it.

C. What then do you think of Judaism, as it now stands, in opposition to Christianity?

D. Not only as without any evidence, the time prophesied of for the coming of the Messiah being long since past; but all their former evidences turn directly against them, and against any Messiah who ever hereafter should come. As that the sceptre should not depart from Judah; that he should come into the second temple; that the sacrifices should cease soon after his death; that David should never want a son to sit upon his throne; that they should be many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, &c. which they do not suppose ever will be the case after their Messiah is come. So that they are witnesses against themselves.

C. And what do you think of the stories of the Heathen gods?

D. I believe them no more than all the stories in Ovid's Metamorphoses. Nor did the wiser Heathens believe them, only such silly people as suck in all the popish legends without examining. And, to tell you the truth, I thought the same of all your stories in the Bible; but I will take time to examine those proofs you have given me. For we Deists

do not dispute against Christianity, in behalf of any other religion of the Jews, or Heathens, or Mahometans, all which pretend to revelation; but we are against all revelation; and go only upon bare nature, and what our own reason dictates to us.

C. What nature dictates, it dictates to all, at least to the most and the generality of mankind; and if we measure by this, then it will appear a natural notion, that there is a necessity of a revelation in religion: and herein you have all the world against you from the very beginning. And will you plead nature against all these?

D. The notion came down from one to another, from the beginning, we know not how.

C. Then it was either nature from the beginning, or else it was from revelation at the beginning; whence the notion has descended through all posterities to this day. And there wants no reason for this: for when man had fallen, and his reason was corrupted, (as we feel it upon us to this day, as sensibly as the diseases and infirmities of the body,) was it not highly reasonable, that God should give us a law and directions how to serve and worship him? Sacrifices do not seem to be any natural invention: for why should taking away the life of my fellow-creature be acceptable to God, or a worship of him? It would rather seem an offence against him. But as types of the great and only propitiatory sacrifice of Christ to come, and to keep up our faith in that, the institution given with the revelation of it, appears most rational. And that it was necessary, the great defection shows, not only of the Heathens, but of the Jews themselves, who, though

they retained the institution, yet, in a great measure, lost the true meaning and signification of it; and are now to be brought back to it, by reminding them of the institution, and the reason of it.

Plato, in his Alcibiad. ii. de Precat. has the same reasoning, and concludes, that we cannot know of ourselves what petitions will be pleasing to God, or what worship to give him: but that it is necessary a lawgiver should be sent from heaven to instruct us; and such a one he did expect; and "O how greatly do I desire to see that man," says he, "and who he is!" The primitive tradition of the expected Messiah had, no doubt, come to him, as to many others of the Heathens, from the Jews, and likely from the perusal of their Scriptures. For Plato goes further, and says, (de Leg. l. 4.) that this lawgiver must be more than man; for he observes, that every nature is governed by another nature that is superior to it, as birds and beasts by man, who is of a distinct and superior nature. So he infers, that this lawgiver, who was to teach man what man could not know by his own nature, must be of a nature that is superior to man, that is, of a divine nature. Nay, he gives as lively a description of the person, qualifications, life, and death of this divine man, as if he had copied the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah: for he says, (de Repub. 1, 2.) that this just person must be poor, and void of all recommendations but that of virtue alone; that a wicked world would not bear his instructions and reproof, and therefore, within three or four years after he began to preach, he should be persecuted, imprisoned, scourged, and at last put to death; his word is, "cut in pieces," as they cut their sacrifices.

D. These are remarkable passages, as you apply them; and Plato was three hundred years before Christ. But I incline to think that these notions came rather from such tradition as you speak of, than from nature; and I can see nothing of nature in sacrifices: they look more like institution, come that how it will.

C. It is strange that all the nations in the world should be carried away from what you call nature; unless you will take refuge among the Hottentots at the Cape of Good Hope, hardly distinguishable from beasts, to show us what nature, left to itself, would do! and leave us all the wise and polite world on the side of revelation, either real or pretended, and of opinion that mankind could not be without it: and my business now with you has been to distinguish the real from the pretended.

D. By the account you have given, there is but one religion in the world, and ever was: for the Jewish was but Christianity in type, though in time greatly corrupted; and the Heathen was a greater corruption, and founded the fables of their gods upon the facts of Scripture; and the Mahometan, you say, is but a heresy of Christianity. So that all is Christianity still.

C. It is true, God gave but one revelation to the world, which was that of Christ; and as that was corrupted, new revelations were pretended. But God has guarded his revelations with such evidences, as it was not in the power of men or devils to counterfeit or contrive any thing like them. Some bear resemblance, in one or two features, in the first two or three evidences that I have produced; but as

none reach the fourth, so they are all quite destitute of the least pretence to the remaining four. So that, when you look upon the face of divine revelation, and take it altogether, it is impossible to mistake it for any of those delusions which the devil has set up in imitation of it. And they are made to confirm it, because all the resemblance they have to truth, is that wherein they are any ways like it; but when compared with it, they show, as an ill-drawn picture, half man half beast, in presence of the beautiful original.

D. It is strange, that, if the case be thus plain as you have made it, the whole world is not immediately convinced.

C. If the seed be ever so good, yet if it be sown upon stones or among thorns, it will bring forth nothing. There are hearts of stone, and others so filled with the love of riches, with the cares and pleasures of this life, that they will not see: they have not a mind to know any thing which they think would disturb them in their enjoyments, or lessen their opinion of them; for that would be taking away so much of their pleasure: therefore it is no easy matter to persuade men to place their happiness in future expectations, which is the import of the Gospel. And in pressing this, and bidding the worldly-minded abandon their beloved vices, and telling the fatal consequences of them, we must expect to meet, not only with their scorn and contempt, but their utmost rage and impatience, to get rid of us, as so many enemies of their lusts and pleasures. This is the cross which our Saviour prepared all his disciples to bear, who were to fight against flesh and

blood, and all the allurements of the world; and it is a greater miracle that they have had so many followers in this, than that they have gained to themselves so many enemies. The world is a strong man, and till a stronger than he come (that is, the full persuasion of the future state) he will keep possession. And "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." But we are told, also, that this faith is the gift of God; for all the evidence in the world will not reach the heart, unless it be prepared (like the good ground) to receive the doctrine that is taught. Till then, prejudice will create obstinacy, which will harden the heart like a rock, and cry, "I will not be persuaded, though I should be persuaded!"

You must consider under this head, too, the many that have not yet heard of the Gospel; and of those that have, the far greater number who have not the capacity or opportunity to examine all the evidences of Christianity, but take things upon trust, just as they are taught. And how many others are careless, and will not be at the pains, though they want not capacity, to inquire into the truth? All these classes will include the greatest part of mankind. The ignorant, the careless, the vicious, and so the obstinate, the ambitious, and the covetous, whose minds the god of this world hath blinded. But yet, in the midst of all this darkness, God had not left himself without witness, which will be apparent to every diligent and sober inquirer that is willing and prepared to receive the truth.

Good Sir, let me ask you, though you are of no religion, as you say, but what you call natural; yet

would you not think me very brutal, if I should deny that ever there was such a man as Alexander, or Cesar, or that they did such things? If I should deny all history, or that Homer, or Virgil, Demosthenes, or Cicero, ever wrote such books; would you not think me perfectly obstinate, seized with a spirit of contradiction, and not fit for human conversation? And yet these things are of no consequence to me, it is not a farthing as to my interest, whether they are true or false.

Will you then think yourself a reasonable man, if in matters of the greatest importance, even your eternal state, you will not believe those facts which have a thousand times more certain and indisputable evidence? Were there any prophecies of Cesar and Pompey? Were there any types of them, or public institutions appointed by a law, to prefigure the great things that they should do? Any persons who went before them, to bear a resemblance of these things, and bid us expect that great event? Was there a general expectation in the world of their coming, before or at the time when they came? And of what consequence was their coming to the world, or to after-ages? No more than a robbery committed a thousand years ago!

Were the Greek and Roman histories written by the persons who did the facts, or by eye-witnesses? And for the greater certainty, were those histories made the standing law of the country? Or were they any more than our Holinshed and Stow, &c.? Must we believe these, on pain of not being thought reasonable men? And are we then unreasonable and credulous, if we believe the facts

of the Holy Bible? which was the standing law of the people to whom it was given, and written or dictated by those who did the facts, with public institutions appointed by them as a perpetual law to all their generations; and which, if the facts had been false, could never have passed at the time when the facts were said to be done: nor, for the same reason, if that book had been written afterwards; because these institutions (as circumcision, the passover, baptism, &c.) were as notorious facts as any; and that book, saying they commenced from the time that the facts were done, must be found to be false, whenever it was trumped up in after-ages, by no such institutions being then known. Not like the feasts, games, &c. in memory of the Heathen gods, which were appointed long after those facts were said to be done; and the like institutions may be appointed to-morrow in memory of any falsehood said to be done a thousand years ago; and so is no proof at all. And though a legend, or book of stories of things said to be done many years past, may be palmed upon people, yet a book of statutes cannot, by which their causes are tried every day.

Are there such prophecies extant in any profane history so long before the facts there recorded, as there are in the Holy Scriptures of the coming of the Messiah? Were there any types or forerunners of the heathen gods, or Mahomet? Is there the like evidence of the truth and sincerity of the Greek and Roman historians, as of the penmen of the Holy Scriptures? Would these historians have given their lives for the truth of all they wrote? Did they tell such facts only, wherein it was impossible

for themselves to be imposed upon, or that they should impose upon others? Nothing but what themselves had seen and heard, and they also to whom they spoke? Did they expect nothing but persecution and death for what they related? And were they bidden to bear it patiently, without resistance? Was this the case of the disciples of Mahomet, who were required to fight and conquer with the sword? Did any religion ever overcome by suffering, but the Christian only? And did any exhibit the future state, and preach the contempt of this world, like the Christian?

D. That is the reason it has prevailed so little. And yet, considering this, it is strange it has prevailed so much.

But there is one thing yet behind, wherein I would be glad to have your opinion, because I find your divines differ about it; and that is, how we shall know to distinguish betwixt true and false miracles. And this is necessary to the subject we are upon. For the force of the facts you allege ends all in this, that such miraculous facts are a sufficient attestation of such persons being sent of God; and, consequently, that we are to believe the doctrine which they taught. You know we Deists deny any such thing as miracles, but reduce all to nature; yet, I confess, if I had seen such miracles as are recorded of Moses and of Christ, it would have convinced me. And, for the truth of them, we must refer to the evidences you have given. But, in the meantime, if there is no rule whereby to distinguish betwixt true and false miracles, there is an end of all the pains you have

taken. For if the devil can work such things as appear miracles to me, I am as much persuaded as if they were true miracles, and wrought by God. And so men may be deceived in trusting to miracles. The common notion of a miracle is what exceeds the power of nature. To which we say, that we know not the utmost of the power of nature, and consequently cannot tell what exceeds it. Nor do you pretend to know the utmost of the power of spirits, whether good or evil, and how then can you tell what exceeds their power? I doubt not but you would have thought those to be true miracles, which the magicians are said to have wrought in Egypt, but that Moses is said to have wrought miracles that were superior to them.

C. Therefore, if two persons contend for the superiority, as here God and the Devil did, the best issue that can be, is to see them wrestle together, and then we shall soon know which is the strongest. This was the case of Moses and the magicians, of Christ and the Devil. There was a struggle, and Satan was plainly overcome.

I confess I know not the power of spirits, nor how they work upon bodies. And by the same reason that a spirit can lift a straw, he may a mountain, and the whole earth, for aught I know; and may do many things which would appear true miracles to me, and so might deceive me. And all I have to trust to in this case, is the restraining power of God, that he will not permit the devil so to do. And, were it not for this, I doubt not but the devil could take away my life in an instant, or inflict terrible diseases upon me, as upon Job. And I think this

consideration is the strongest motive in the world to keep us in a constant dependence upon God, that we may live in the midst of such powerful enemies as we can by no means resist of ourselves, and are in their power every minute, when God shall withdraw his protection from us. And it is in their power likewise to work signs and wonders to deceive us, if God permit.—And herein the great power and goodness of God is manifest, that he has never yet permitted the devil to work miracles in opposition to any whom he sent, except where the remedy was at hand, and to show his power the more, as in the case of Moses and the magicians, &c. And this is further evident, because God has, at other times, and upon other occasions, suffered the devil to exert his power, as to make fire descend upon Job's cattle, &c. But here was no cause of religion concerned, nor any truth of God in debate.

D. But your Christ has foretold, Matt. xxiv. 24. that false Christs and false Prophets shall arise, who shall show great signs and wonders, to deceive, if possible, the very elect. And it is said, 2 Thess. ii. 9. that there shall be a wicked one, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders; and it is supposed, Deut. xiii. 1, &c. that a false prophet may give a sign or a wonder, to draw men after false gods. Here, then, is sign against sign, and wonder against wonder, and which of these shall we believe?

C. The first, no doubt. For God cannot contradict himself, nor will show signs and wonders in opposition to that law which he has established by so many signs and wonders. Therefore, in such a

case, we must conclude, that God has permitted the devil to exert his power, as against Moses and Christ, for the trial of our faith, and to show the superior power of God more eminently, in overcoming all the power of the enemy.

But, as I said before, we have a more sure word, that is, proof, than even these miracles exhibited to our outward senses, which is the word of prophecy. Let, then, any false Christ who shall pretend to come hereafter, show such a book as our Bible, which has been so long in the world (the most ancient book now extant) testifying of him, foretelling the time, and all other circumstances of his coming, with his sufferings and death, and all these prophecies exactly fulfilled in him. And till he can do this, he cannot have that evidence which our Christ has, and he must be a false Christ to me, and all the signs that he can show, will be but lying wonders to any that is truly established in the Christian faith. But it may be a trial too strong for those careless ones who will not be at the pains to inquire into the grounds of their religion, but take it upon trust, as they do the fashions, and mind not to frame their lives according to it, but are immersed in the world, and the pleasures of it.

And it will be a just judgment upon these, that they who shut their eyes against all the clear evidences of the Gospel, should be given up to believe a lie. And the reason is given, 2 Thess. ii. 12. because they "had pleasure in unrighteousness." They loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

So that I must repeat what I said before, that

there is a preparation of the heart (as of the ground) to receive the truth. And where the doctrine does not please, no evidence, how clear soever, will be received. God cannot enter, till mammon be dispossessed. We cannot serve these two masters. He who has a clear sight of heaven, cannot value the dull pleasures of this life; and it is impossible that he who is drowned in sense can relish spiritual things. The love of this world is enmity against God. The first sin was a temptation of sense; and the reparation is to open our eyes to the enjoyment of God. Vice clouds this eye, and makes it blind to the only true and eternal pleasure. It is foolishness to such a one.

This, this, Sir, is the *remora* that keeps men from Christianity. It is not want of evidence, but it is want of consideration. I would not say this to you till I had first gone through all the topics of reason with you, that you might not call it cant. But this is the truth. As David says, "To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God." And our Saviour says, "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." And "No man can come unto me except the Father draw him."

This was the reason why John the Baptist was sent as a forerunner to prepare the way for Christ, by preaching of repentance, to fit men for receiving the Gospel. And they who repented of their sins upon his preaching, did gladly embrace the doctrine of Christ. But they who would not forsake their sins remained obdurate, though other-

wise men of sense and learning. As our Saviour told the Priests and Elders, "John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterwards, that ye might believe him." And when Christ sought to prepare them for his doctrine, by telling them, that they could not serve God and mammon, it is said, Luke xvi. 14. "That when the Pharisees, who were covetous, heard these things, they derided him." But he instructed them, in the next verse, (if they would have received it) that "what is highly esteemed amongst men, is abomination in the sight of God." And enforced this with the example of the rich man and Lazarus. And said, "that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." And "that whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Now, take this in the largest sense, that he who is not ready and willing to forsake all, as if he hated them, as Christ said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother," &c. (that is, when they come in competition with any command of Christ) and "take not his cross and follow me, he cannot be my disciple." How few disciples would he have had in this age! Would all his miracles persuade some to this! The world is too hard for heaven with most men!

Here is the cause of infidelity. The love of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, darken the heart, and, like shutters, keep out the light of heaven; till they are removed, the light cannot enter. The spirit of purity and

holiness will not descend into a heart full of all uncleanness. If we would invite this guest, we must sweep the house and make it clean. But this too is of God; for he only can make a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us. But he has promised to give this wisdom to those who ask it, and lead a godly life. Therefore, ask, and you shall have; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. But do it ardently and incessantly, as he that striveth for his soul. For God is gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and of great goodness: and those who come to him in sincerity, he will in nowise cast out. Therefore, pray in faith, nothing doubting; and what you pray for, (according to his will,) believe that you receive it, and you shall receive it. To his grace I commend you.

And, with the fulness of the Gentiles, O! that it would please God to take the veil off the heart of the Jews, and let them see that they have been deceived by many false Messiahs, since Christ came; so none whom they expect hereafter, can answer the prophecies of the Messiah, (some of which I have named) and therefore no such can be the Messiah who is prophesied of in their own Scriptures.

And let them see and consider how that fatal curse they imprecated upon themselves, "his blood be upon us and on our children," has cleaved to them, beyond all their former sins, and even repeated idolatry, from which (to show that is not the cause of their present dispersion) they have kept themselves free ever since; and for which their longest captivity was but 70 years, and then prophets were sent to them to comfort them, and assure them

of a restoration: but now they have been about 1700 years dispersed over all the earth, without any prophet, or prospect of their deliverance: that the whole world might take notice of this before unparalleled judgment, not known to any nation that ever yet was upon the face of the earth! So punished, and so preserved for judgment, and I hope, at last, for a more wonderful mercy! "For, if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For God hath concluded all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things. To whom be glory for ever. Amen."

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

CONVERSION AND APOSTLESHIP

OF

ST. PAUL.

BY

GEORGE, LORD LYTTELTON.

TO

GILBERT WEST, Esq.

Sir,

In a late conversation we had together, upon the subject of the Christian Religion, I told you, that, besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his resurrection by all the other apostles, I thought the conversion and the apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation.

As you seemed to think, that so compendious a proof might be of use to convince those unbelievers that will not attend to a longer series of arguments, I have thrown together the reasons upon which I support that proposition.

ON THE

CONVERSION AND APOSTLESHIP

OF

ST. PAUL.

In the 26th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, written by a contemporary author, and a companion of St. Paul in preaching the Gospel, as appears by the book itself, chap. xx. ver. 6, 13, 14. chap. xxvii. ver. 1, &c. St. Paul is said to have himself given this account of his conversion and preaching to King Agrippa, and Festus the Roman governor: "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, (if they would testify,) that after the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come: for which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the

name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme: and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at mid-day, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me, and them which journeyed with me. And, when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying, in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister, and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they

should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the King knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." In another chapter of the same book, he gives in substance the same account to the Jews, adding these further particulars: "And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias,

a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

In the 9th chapter of the same book, the Author of it relates the same story with some other circumstances, not mentioned in these accounts: As, "that Saul in a vision saw Ananias," before he came to him, "coming in, and putting his hand upon him that he might receive his sight." And that when Ananias had spoken to him, "immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales." And, agreeably to all these accounts, St. Paul thus speaks of himself, in the epistles he wrote to the several churches he planted; the authenticity of which cannot be doubted without overturning all rules, by which the authority and genuineness of any writings can be proved, or confirmed.

To the Galatians he says, "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and

wasted it; and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood," &c.

To the Philippians he says, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

And in his epistle to Timothy he writes thus: "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

In other epistles he calls himself "an Apostle by the will of God, by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ;—and an Apostle, not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." All which implies some miraculous call that made

him an apostle.—And to the Corinthians he says, after enumerating many appearances of Jesus after his resurrection, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

Now it must of necessity be, that the person attesting these things of himself, and of whom they are related in so authentic a manner, either was an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive; or he was an enthusiast, who, by the force of an overheated imagination, imposed on himself; or he was deceived by the fraud of others, and all that he said must be imputed to the power of that deceit; or what he declared to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen; and, therefore, the Christian religion is a Divine Revelation. Now, that he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, I shall endeavour to prove, by showing that he could have no rational motives to undertake such an imposture, nor could have possibly carried it on with any success by the means we know he employed.

First, then, the inducement to such an imposture must have been one of these two: either the hope of advancing himself by it in his temporal interest, credit, or power; or the gratification of some of his passions under the authority of it, and by the means it afforded.

Now, these were the circumstances in which St. Paul declared his conversion to the faith of Christ Jesus. That Jesus, who called himself the Messiah, and Son of God, notwithstanding the in-

nocence and holiness of his life, notwithstanding the miracles by which he attested his mission, had been crucified by the Jews as an impostor and blasphemer, which crucifixion not only must (humanly speaking) have intimidated others from following him, or espousing his doctrines, but served to confirm the Jews in their opinion that he could not be their promised Messiah, who, according to all *their* prejudices, was not to suffer in any manner, but to reign triumphant for ever here upon earth.

His apostles indeed, though at first they appeared to be terrified by the death of their Master, and disappointed in all their hopes, yet had surprisingly recovered their spirits again, and publicly taught in his name, declaring him to be risen from the grave, and confirming that miracle by many miracles they worked, or pretended to work, themselves. But the chief priests and rulers among the Jews, were so far from being converted, either by their words or their works, that they had begun a severe persecution against them; put some to death, imprisoned others, and were going on with implacable rage against the whole sect. In all these severities St. Paul concurred, being himself a Pharisee, "bred up at the feet of Gamaliel," one of the chief of that sect: nor was he content, in the heat of his zeal, with persecuting the Christians who were at Jerusalem, but, "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high-priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem." His request was com-

plied with, " and he went to Damascus with authority and commission from the high-priest." At this instant of time, and under these circumstances, did he become a disciple of Christ. What could be his motives to take such a part? Was it the hope of increasing his wealth? The certain consequence of his taking that part, was not only the loss of all that he had, but of all hopes of acquiring more.—Those whom he had left were the disposers of wealth, of dignity, of power in Judea. Those whom he went to were indigent men, oppressed and kept down from all means of improving their fortunes. They among them who had more than the rest, shared what they had with their brethren, but with this assistance the whole community was hardly supplied with the necessaries of life. And even in churches he afterwards planted himself, which were much more wealthy than that of Jerusalem, so far was St. Paul from availing himself of their charity, or the veneration they had for him, in order to draw that wealth to himself, that he often refused to take any part of it for the necessaries of life.

Thus he tells the Corinthians, " Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands."

In another epistle he writes to them, " Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you; for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children."

To the Thessalonians he says, " As we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel,

even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travel: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God." And again, in another letter to them, he repeats the same testimony of his disinterestedness: "Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you." And when he took his farewell of the Church of Ephesus, to whom he foretold that they should see him no more, he gives this testimony of himself, and appeals to them for the truth of it: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." It is, then, evident, both from the state of the church when St. Paul first came into it, and from his behaviour afterwards, that he had no thoughts of increasing his wealth by becoming a Christian; whereas, by continuing to be their enemy, he had almost certain hopes of making his fortune by the favour of those who were at the head of the Jewish state, to whom nothing could more recommend him than the zeal that he showed in that persecution. As to credit or reputation, that, too, lay all on the side he forsook.—The sect he embraced, was under the greatest and most universal contempt

of any then in the world. The chiefs and leaders of it were men of the lowest birth, education, and rank. They had no one advantage of parts or learning, or other human endowments to recommend them. The doctrines they taught were contrary to those which they who were accounted the wisest and the most knowing of their nation professed. The wonderful works that they did, were either imputed to magic or to imposture. The very Author and Head of their faith had been condemned as a criminal, and died on the cross between two thieves. Could the disciple of Gamaliel think he should gain any credit or reputation by becoming a teacher in a college of fishermen? Could he flatter himself, that either in or out of Judea the doctrines he taught could do him any honour? No: he knew very well that the "preaching Christ crucified was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness." He afterwards found by experience, that in all parts of the world, contempt was the portion of whoever engaged in preaching a mystery so unpalatable to the world, to all its passions and pleasures, and so irreconcileable to the pride of human reason. "We are made," says he to the Corinthians, "as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things unto this day." Yet he went on as zealously as he set out, and "was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Certainly, then, the desire of glory, the ambition of making to himself a great name, was not his motive to embrace Christianity. Was it then the love of power? Power! over whom? over a flock of sheep driven to the slaughter, whose Shepherd himself had been murdered a little

before. All he could hope from that power was to be marked out in a particular manner, for the same knife which he had seen so bloodily drawn against them. Could he expect more mercy from the chief priests and the rulers, than they had shown to Jesus himself? Would not their anger be probably fiercer against the deserter and betrayer of their cause, than against any other of the apostles? Was power over so mean and despised a set of men worth the attempting with so much danger? But still, it may be said, there are some natures so fond of power, that they will court it at any risk, and be pleased with it even over the meanest. Let us see, then, what power St. Paul assumed over the Christians. Did he pretend to any superiority over the other apostles? No: he declared himself "the least of them," and "less than the least of all saints." Even in the churches he himself planted, he never pretended to any primacy or power above the other apostles; nor would he be regarded any otherwise by them, than as the instrument to them of the grace of God, and preacher of the Gospel, not as the head of a sect. To the Corinthians he writes in these words, "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" And in another place, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

All the authority he exercised over them was purely of a spiritual nature, tending to their instruction and edification, without any mixture of that civil dominion in which alone an impostor can find his account. Such was the dominion acquired and exercised, through the pretence of divine inspiration, by many ancient legislators, by Minos, Radamanthus, Triptolemus, Lycurgus, Numa, Zaleucus, Zoroaster, Xamolxis, nay, even by Pythagoras, who joined legislation to his philosophy, and, like the others, pretended to miracles and revelations from God, to give a more venerable sanction to the laws he prescribed. Such, in later times, was attained by Odin among the Goths, by Mahomet among the Arabians, by Mango Capac among the Peruvians, by the Sofi family among the Persians, and that of the Zeriffs among the Moors. To such a dominion did also aspire the many false Messiahs among the Jews.—In short, a spiritual authority was only desired as a foundation for temporal power, or as the support of it, by all these pretenders to Divine inspirations, and others, whom history mentions in different ages and countries, to have used the same arts. But St. Paul innovated nothing in government or civil affairs, he meddled not with legislation, he formed no commonwealths, he raised no seditions, he affected no temporal power.

Obedience to their rulers was the doctrine he taught to the churches he planted, and what he taught he practised himself; nor did he use any of those soothing arts by which ambitious and cunning men recommend themselves to the favour of those whom they endeavour to subject to their power.

Whatever was wrong in the disciples under his care he freely reproved, as it became a teacher from God, of which numberless instances are to be found in all his epistles. And he was as careful of them when he had left them, as while he resided among them, which an impostor would hardly have been, whose ends were centred all in himself.

This is the manner in which he writes to the Philippians: "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." And a little after he adds the cause why he interested himself so much in their conduct, "that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Are these the words of an impostor, desiring nothing but temporal power? No: they are evidently written by one who looked beyond the bounds of this life. But it may be said, that he affected at least an absolute spiritual power over the churches he formed. I answer, "he preached Christ Jesus, and not himself." Christ was the Head, he only the minister, and for such only he gave himself to them. He called those who assisted him in preaching the Gospel, his fellow-labourers and fellow-servants.

So far was he from taking any advantage of a higher education, superior learning, and more use of

the world, to claim to himself any supremacy above the other apostles, that he made light of all those attainments, and declared, "that he came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, but determined to know nothing among" those he converted, "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And the reason he gave for it was, "that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Now this conduct put him quite on a level with the other apostles, who knew Jesus Christ as well as he, and had the power of God going along with their preaching, in an equal degree of virtue and grace. But an impostor, whose aim had been power, would have acted a contrary part: he would have availed himself of all those advantages, he would have extolled them as highly as possible, he would have set up himself, by virtue of them, as head of that sect to which he acceded, or, at least, of the proselytes made by himself. This is no more than was done by every philosopher who formed a school; much more was it natural in one who propagated a new religion.

We see that the Bishops of Rome have claimed to themselves a primacy, or rather a monarchy, over the whole Christian church. If St. Paul had been actuated by the same lust of dominion, it was much easier for him to have succeeded in such an attempt. It was much easier for him to make himself head of a few poor mechanics and fishermen, whose superior he had always been in the eyes of the world, than for the Bishops of Rome to reduce those of Ravenna or Milan, and other great metropolitans, to their obedience.

Besides the opposition they met with from such potent antagonists, they were obliged to support their pretensions in direct contradiction to those very Scriptures which they were forced to ground them upon, and to the indisputable practice of the whole Christian church for many centuries. These were such difficulties, as required the utmost abilities and skill to surmount. But the first preachers of the Gospel had easier means to corrupt a faith not yet fully known, and which in many places could only be known by what they severally published themselves. It was necessary, indeed, while they continued together, and taught the same people, that they should agree, otherwise the credit of their sect would have been overthrown; but when they separated, and formed different churches in distant countries, the same necessity no longer remained.

It was in the power of St. Paul to model most of the churches he formed, so as to favour his own ambition: for he preached the Gospel in parts of the world where no other apostles had been, where Christ was not named till he brought the knowledge of him, avoiding "to build upon another man's foundation." Now, had he been an impostor, would he have confined himself to just the same Gospel as was delivered by the other apostles, where he had such a latitude to preach what he pleased, without contradiction? Would he not have twisted and warped the doctrines of Christ to his own ends, to the particular use and expediency of his own followers, and to the peculiar support and increase of his own power? That this was not done by St. Paul, or by any other of the apostles, in so many various parts of the

world as they travelled into, and in churches absolutely under their own direction; that the Gospel preached by them all should be one and the same, the doctrines agreeing in every particular, without any one of them attributing more to himself than he did to the others, or establishing any thing, even in point of order or discipline, different from the rest, or more advantageous to his own interest, credit, or power, is a most strong and convincing proof of their not being impostors, but acting entirely by divine inspiration.

If, then, it appears that St. Paul had nothing to gain by taking this part, let us consider, on the other hand, what he gave up, and what he had reason to fear. He gave up a fortune, which he was in a fair way of advancing. He gave up that reputation which he had acquired by the labours and studies of his whole life, and by a behaviour which had been blameless, touching the righteousness which is in the law. He gave up his friends, his relations, and family, from whom he estranged and banished himself for life. He gave up that religion, which he had profited in above many of his equals in his own nation, and those traditions of his fathers, of which he had been more exceedingly zealous. How hard this sacrifice was to a man of his warm temper, and, above all men, to a Jew, is worth consideration. That nation is known to have been more tenacious of their religious opinions than any other upon the face of the earth. The strictest and proudest sect among them was that of the Pharisees, under whose discipline St. Paul was bred. The departing, therefore, so suddenly from their favourite tenets, renouncing their pride, and, from their disciple be-

coming their adversary, was a most difficult effort for one to make, so nursed up in the esteem of them, and whose early prejudices were so strongly confirmed, by all the power of habit, all the authority of example, and all the allurements of honour and interest. These were the sacrifices he had to make in becoming a Christian. Let us now see what inconveniencies he had to fear: The implacable vengeance of those he deserted; that sort of contempt which is hardest to bear, the contempt of those whose good opinion he had most eagerly sought; and all those other complicated evils which he describes in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xi. Evils, the least of which were enough to have frightened any impostor, even from the most hopeful and profitable cheat. But where the advantage proposed bears no proportion to the dangers incurred, or the mischiefs endured, he must be absolutely out of his senses, who will either engage in an imposture, or, being engaged, persevere.

Upon the whole, then, I think I have proved, that the desire of wealth, of fame, or of power, could be no motive to make St. Paul a convert to Christ; but that, on the contrary, he must have been checked by that desire, as well as by the just apprehension of many inevitable and insupportable evils, from taking a part so contradictory to his past life, to all the principles he had imbibed, all the habits he had contracted. It only remains to be inquired, whether the gratification of any other passion under the authority of that religion, or by the means it afforded, could be his inducement.

Now, that there have been some impostors, who

have pretended to revelations from God, merely to give a loose to irregular passions, and set themselves free from all restraints of government, law, or morality, both ancient and modern history shows. But the doctrine preached by St. Paul is absolutely contrary to all such designs. His writings breathe nothing but the strictest morality, obedience to magistrates, order, and government, with the utmost abhorrence of all licentiousness, idleness, or loose behaviour, under the cloak of religion. We no where read in his works that saints are above moral ordinances; that dominion, or property, is founded in grace; that there is no difference in moral actions; that any impulses of the mind are to direct us against the light of our reason and the laws of nature; or any of those wicked tenets from which the peace of society has been disturbed, and the rules of morality have been broken, by men pretending to act under the sanction of a divine revelation. Nor does any part of his life, either before or after his conversion to Christianity, bear any mark of a libertine disposition. As among the Jews, so among the Christians, his conversation and manners were blameless. Hear the appeal that he makes to the Thessalonians upon his doctrine and behaviour among them: "Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves among you that believe." And to the Corinthians he says, "We have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man."

It was not, then, the desire of gratifying any irregular passion, that could induce St. Paul to turn

Christian, any more than the hope of advancing himself either in wealth, or reputation, or power. But still it is possible, some men may say, (and I would leave no imaginable objection unanswered,) that, though St. Paul could have no selfish or interested view in undertaking such an imposture, yet, for the sake of its moral doctrines, he might be inclined to support the Christian faith, and make use of some pious frauds, to advance a religion, which, though erroneous and false in its theological tenets, and in the facts upon which it was grounded, was, in its precepts and influence, beneficial to mankind.

Now it is true, that some good men in the Heathen world have both pretended to divine revelations, and introduced or supported religions they knew to be false, under a notion of public utility: but besides that this practice was built upon maxims disclaimed by the Jews, (who, looking upon truth, not utility, to be the basis of their religion, abhorred all such frauds, and thought them injurious to the honour of God,) the circumstances they acted in were very different from those of St. Paul.

The first reformers of savage, uncivilized nations, had no other way to tame those barbarous people, and bring them to submit to order and government, but by the reverence which they acquired from this pretence. The fraud was, therefore, alike beneficial both to the deceiver and the deceived. And, in all other instances which can be given of good men acting this part, they not only did it to serve good ends, but were secure of its doing no harm. Thus, when Lycurgus persuaded the Spartans, or Numa the Romans, that the laws of the one were inspired by

Apollo, or those of the other by Egeria; when they taught their people to put great faith in oracles, or in augury, no temporal mischief, either to them or their people, could attend the reception of that belief. It drew on no persecutions, no enmity with the world. But at the time when St. Paul undertook the preaching of the Gospel, to persuade any man to be a Christian, was to persuade him to expose himself to all the calumnies human nature could suffer. This St. Paul knew; this he not only expected, but warned those he taught to look for it too. The only support that he had himself, or gave to them, was, "That if they suffered with Christ, they should be also glorified together;" and that "he reckoned the sufferings of the present time were not worthy to be compared with that glory." So likewise he writes to the Thessalonians: "We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure; which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense (or pay) tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." And to the Corinthians he says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable." How much reason he had to say this, the hatred, the contempt, the torments, the deaths, endured by the Christians in that age, and long afterwards, abundantly prove. Whoever professed the Gospel

under these circumstances, without an entire conviction of its being a Divine Revelation, must have been mad; and if he made others profess it by fraud or deceit, he must have been worse than mad, he must have been the most hardened wretch that ever breathed.—Could any man, who had in his nature the least spark of humanity, subject his fellow-creatures to so many miseries; or could one that had in his mind the least ray of reason, expose himself to share them with those he deceived, in order to advance a religion which he knew to be false, merely for the sake of its moral doctrines? Such an extravagance is too absurd to be supposed; and I dwell too long on a notion that, upon a little reflection, confutes itself.

I would only add to the other proofs I have given, that St. Paul could have no rational motive to become a disciple of Christ, unless he sincerely believed in him, this observation, That whereas it may be objected to the other apostles, by those who are resolved not to credit their testimony, that having been deeply engaged with Jesus during his life, they were obliged to continue the same professions after his death, for the support of their own credit, and from having gone too far to go back, this can by no means be said of St. Paul. On the contrary, whatever force there may be in that way of reasoning, it all tends to convince us that St. Paul must naturally have continued a Jew, and an enemy of Christ Jesus. If they were engaged on one side, he was as strongly engaged on the other. If shame withheld them from changing sides, much more ought it to have stopped him, who, being of a much higher education and rank in life than they, had more credit

to lose, and must be supposed to have been vastly more sensible to that sort of shame. The only difference was, that they, by quitting their Master after his death, might have preserved themselves; whereas he, by quitting the Jews, and taking up the cross of Christ, certainly brought on his own destruction.

As, therefore, no rational motive appears for St. Paul's embracing the faith of Christ, without having been really convinced of the truth of it; but, on the contrary, every thing concurred to deter him from acting that part; one might very justly conclude, that when a man of his understanding embraced that faith, he was in reality convinced of the truth of it, and that, by consequence, he was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive.

But, that no shadow of doubt may remain upon the impossibility of his having been such an impostor; that it may not be said, The minds of men are sometimes so capricious, that they will act without any rational motives, they know not why, and so perhaps might St. Paul;—I shall next endeavour to prove, that if he had been so unaccountably wild and absurd as to undertake an imposture so unprofitable and dangerous, both to himself and those he deceived by it, he could not possibly have carried it on with any success, by the means that we know he employed.

First, then, let me observe, that if his conversion, and the part that he acted in consequence of it, was an imposture, it was such an imposture, as could not be carried on by one man alone. The faith he professed, and which he became an apostle of, was not

his invention. He was not the author or beginner of it, and therefore it was not in his power to draw the doctrines of it out of his own imagination.—With Jesus, who was the Author and Head of it, he had never had any communication before his death, nor with his apostles after his death, except as their persecutor.

As he took on himself the office and character of an Apostle, it was absolutely necessary for him to have a precise and perfect knowledge of all the facts contained in the gospel, several of which had only passed between Jesus and his twelve apostles, and others more privately still, so that they could be known but to very few, being not yet made public by any writings: otherwise he would have exposed himself to ridicule among those who preached that gospel with more knowledge than he; and as the testimony they bore would have been different in point of fact, and many of their doctrines and interpretations of Scripture repugnant to his, from their entire disagreement with those Jewish opinions in which he was bred up; either they must have been forced to ruin his credit, or he would have ruined theirs. Some general notices he might have gained of these matters from the Christians he persecuted, but not exact nor extensive enough to qualify him for an apostle, whom the least error in these points would have disgraced, and who must have been ruined by it in all his pretensions to that inspiration, from whence the apostolical authority was chiefly derived.

It was therefore impossible for him to act this part but in confederacy at least with the apostles.

Such a confederacy was still more necessary for him, as the undertaking to preach the gospel did not only require an exact and particular knowledge of all it contained, but an apparent power of working miracles; for to such a power all the apostles appealed in proof of their mission, and of the doctrines they preached. He was therefore to learn of them by what secret arts they so imposed on the senses of men, if this power was a cheat. But how could he gain these men to become his confederates? Was it by furiously persecuting them and their brethren, as we find that he did, to the very moment of his conversion? Would they venture to trust their capital enemy with all the secrets of their imposture, with those upon which all their hopes and credit depended? Would they put it in his power to take away not only their lives, but the honour of their sect, which they preferred to their lives, by so ill-placed a confidence? Would men so secret as not to be drawn by the most severe persecutions, to say one word which could convict them of being impostors, confess themselves such to their persecutor, in hopes of their being his accomplice? This is still more impossible than that he should attempt to engage in their fraud without their consent and assistance.

We must suppose, then, that till he came to Damascus, he had no communication with the apostles, acted in no concert with them, and learned nothing from them except the doctrines which they had publicly taught to all the world. When he came there, he told the Jews, to whom he brought letters from the high-priest and the synagogue against the Chris-

tians, of his having seen in the way a great light from heaven, and heard Christ Jesus reproaching him with his persecution, and commanding him to go into the city, where it should be told him what he was to do. But to account for his choosing this method of declaring himself a convert to Christ, we must suppose that all those who were with him, when he pretended he had his vision, were his accomplices. Otherwise the story he told could have gained no belief, being contradicted by them whose testimony was necessary to vouch for the truth of it. And yet, how can we suppose that all these men should be willing to join in this imposture? They were probably officers of justice, or soldiers, who had been employed often before in executing the orders of the high-priest and the rulers against the Christians. Or if they were chosen particularly for this expedition, they must have been chosen by them as men they could trust for their zeal in that cause. What should induce them to the betraying that business they were employed in? Does it even appear that they had any connection with the man they so lied for, before or after this time, or any reward from him for it? This is therefore a difficulty in the first outset of this imposture, not to be overcome.

But further, he was to be instructed by one at Damascus. That instructor, therefore, must have been his accomplice, though they appear to be absolute strangers to one another, and though he was a man of an excellent character, who had a good report of all the Jews that dwelt at Damascus, and so was very unlikely to have engaged in such an imposture.

Notwithstanding these improbabilities, this man, I say, must have been his confident and accomplice in carrying on this wicked fraud, and the whole matter must have been previously agreed on between them. But here again the same objection occurs: How could this man venture to act such a dangerous part without the consent of the other disciples, especially of the apostles, or by what means could he obtain their consent? And how absurdly did they contrive their business, to make the conversion of Saul the effect of a miracle, which all those who were with him must certify did never happen? How much easier would it have been to have made him be present at some pretended miracle wrought by the disciples, or by Ananias himself, when none were able to discover the fraud, and have imputed his conversion to that, or to the arguments used by some of his prisoners whom he might have discoursed with, and questioned about their faith, and the grounds of it, in order to colour his intended conversion.

As this was the safest, so it was the most natural method of bringing about such a change; instead of ascribing it to an event which lay so open to detection. "For," to use the words of St. Paul to Agrippa, "this thing was not done in a corner," but in the eye of the world, and subject immediately to the examination of those who would be most strict in searching into the truth of it, the Jews at Damascus. Had they been able to bring any shadow of proof to convict him of fraud in this affair, his whole scheme of imposture must have been nipt in the bud. Nor were they at Jerusalem, whose commission he bore, less concerned to discover so provoking a cheat. But

we find that, many years afterwards, when they had all the time and means they could desire to make the strictest inquiry, he was bold enough to appeal to Agrippa in the presence of Festus, upon his own knowledge of the truth of his story: who did not contradict him, though he had certainly heard all that the Jews could allege against the credit of it in any particular. A very remarkable proof both of the notoriety of the fact, and the integrity of the man, who, with so fearless a confidence, could call upon a king to give testimony for him, even while he was sitting in judgment upon him.

But to return to Ananias. Is it not strange, if this story had been an imposture, and he had been joined with Paul in carrying it on, that after their meeting at Damascus we never should hear of their consorting together, or acting in concert, or that the former drew any benefit from the friendship of the latter, when he became so considerable among the Christians? Did Ananias engage and continue in such a dangerous fraud, without any hope or desire of private advantage! Or was it safe for Paul to shake him off, and risk his resentment? There is, I think, no other way to get over this difficulty, but by supposing that Ananias happened to die soon after the other's conversion. Let us then take that for granted, without any authority, either of history or tradition, and let us see in what manner this wondrous imposture was carried on by Paul himself. His first care ought to have been, to get himself owned, and received as an apostle by the apostles. Till this was done, the bottom he stood upon was very narrow, nor could he have any probable means

of supporting himself in any esteem or credit among the disciples. Intruders into impostures run double risks; they are in danger of being detected, not only by those upon whom they attempt to practise their cheats, but also by those whose society they force themselves into, who must always be jealous of such an intrusion, and much more from one who had always before behaved as their enemy. Therefore, to gain the apostles, and bring them to admit him into a participation of all their mysteries, all their designs, and all their authority, was absolutely necessary at this time to Paul. The least delay was of dangerous consequence, and might expose him to such inconveniencies as he never afterwards could overcome. But instead of attending to this necessity, he went into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus; nor did he go to Jerusalem till three years were past.

Now this conduct may be accounted for, if it be true that, as he declares in his Epistle to the Galatians, "he neither received the Gospel of any man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Under such a Master, and with the assistance of his divine power, he might go on boldly without any human associates; but an impostor so left to himself, so deprived of all help, all support, all recommendation, could not have succeeded.

Further; we find that at Antioch he was not afraid to "withstand Peter to his face, and even to reprove him before all the disciples, because he was to be blamed." If he was an impostor, how could he venture to offend that apostle whom it so highly concerned him to agree with and please? Accomplices in a fraud are obliged to show greater regards to each other: such freedom belongs to truth alone.

But let us consider what difficulties he had to encounter among the Gentiles themselves, in the enterprise he undertook of going to them, making himself their apostle, and converting them to the religion of Christ. As this undertaking was the distinguishing part of his apostolical functions, that which, in the language of his epistles, he was particularly called to; or which, to speak like an unbeliever, he chose and assigned to himself, it deserves a particular consideration. But I shall only touch the principal points of it as concisely as I can, because you have in a great measure exhausted the subject in your late excellent book on the Resurrection, where you discourse with such strength of reason and eloquence upon the difficulties that opposed the propagation of the Christian religion in all parts of the world.

Now in this enterprise St. Paul was to contend, 1st, With the policy and power of the magistrates; 2dly, With the interest, credit, and craft of the priests; 3dly, With the prejudices and passions of the people; 4thly, With the wisdom and pride of the philosophers.

That in all heathen countries the established religion was interwoven with their civil constitution, and supported by the magistrates as an essential part of the government, whoever has any acquaintance with antiquity cannot but know. They tolerated indeed many different worships, (though not with so entire a latitude as some people suppose) as they suffered men to discourse very freely concerning religion, provided they would submit to an exterior conformity with the established rites; nay, according

to the genius of Paganism, which allowed an intercommunity of worship, they in most places admitted, without any great difficulty, new gods and new rites; but they no where endured any attempt to overturn the established religion, or any direct opposition made to it, esteeming that an unpardonable offence, not to the gods alone, but to the state. This was so universal a notion, and so constant a maxim of heathen policy, that when the Christian religion set itself up in opposition to all other religions, admitted no intercommunity with them, but declared that the gods of the Gentiles, "were not to be worshipped," nor any society suffered between them and the "only true God;" when this new doctrine began to be propagated, and made such a progress as to fall under the notice of the magistrate, the civil power was every where armed with all its terrors against it. When therefore St. Paul undertook the conversion of the Gentiles, he knew very well that the most severe persecutions must be the consequence of any success in his design.

Secondly, This danger was rendered more certain by the opposition he was to expect from the interest, credit, and craft of the priests. How gainful a trade they, with all their inferior dependants, made of those superstitions which he proposed to destroy; how much credit they had with the people, as well as the state by the means of them, and how much craft they employed in carrying on their impostures, all history shows. St. Paul could not doubt that all these men would exert their utmost abilities to stop the spreading of the doctrines he preached, doctrines which struck at the root of their power

and gain, and were much more terrible to them than those of the most atheistical sect of philosophers, because the latter contented themselves with denying their principles, but at the same time declared for supporting their practices, as useful cheats, or at least acquiesced in them as establishments authorised by the sanction of law. Whatever, therefore, their cunning could do to support their own worship, whatever aid they could draw from the magistrate, whatever zeal they could raise in the people, St. Paul was to contend with, unsupported by any human assistance.

And, Thirdly, This he was to do in direct opposition to all the prejudices and passions of the people. Now, had he confined his preaching to Judea alone, this difficulty would not have occurred in near so great a degree. The people there were so moved by the miracles the apostles had wrought, as well as by the memory of those done by Jesus, that, in spite of all their rulers, they began to be favourably disposed towards them; and we even find that the high-priest and the council had more than once been withheld from treating the apostles with so much severity as they desired to do, "for fear of the people." But in the people among the Gentiles no such dispositions could be expected: Their prejudices were violent, not only in favour of their own superstitions, but in a particular manner against any doctrines taught by a Jew. As, from their aversion to all idolatry, and irreconcilable separation from all other religions, the Jews were accused of hating mankind, so were they hated by all other nations; nor were they hated alone, but despised. To what a degree that con-

tempt was carried, appears as well by the mention made of them in heathen authors, as by the complaints Josephus makes of the unreasonableness and injustice of it in his Apology. What authority, then, could St. Paul flatter himself that his preaching would carry along with it, among people to whom he was at once both the object of national hatred and national scorn? But, besides this popular prejudice against a Jew, the doctrines he taught were such as shocked all their most ingrafted religious opinions. They agreed to no principles, of which he could avail himself, to procure their assent to the other parts of the Gospel he preached. To convert the Jews to Christ Jesus, he was able to argue from their own Scriptures, upon the authority of books which they owned to contain divine revelations, and from which he could clearly convince them that Jesus *was the very* Christ. But all these ideas were new to the Gentiles; they expected no Christ, they allowed no such Scriptures, they were to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. How was this to be done, by a man not even authorised by his own nation? opposed by those who were greatest, and thought wisest among them? either quite single, or only attended by one or two more, under the same disadvantages, and even of less consideration than he?

The light of Nature, indeed, without express Revelation, might have conducted the Gentiles to the knowledge of one God, the Creator of all things; and to that light St. Paul might appeal, as we find that he did. But, clear as it was, they had almost put it out by their superstitions, "having changed the

glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things, and serving the creature more than the Creator." And to this idolatry they were strongly attached, not by their prejudices alone, but by their passions, which were flattered and gratified in it, as they believed that their deities would be rendered propitious, not by virtue and holiness, but by offerings and incense, and outward rites; rites which dazzled their senses by magnificent shows, and allured them by pleasures often of a very impure and immoral nature. Instead of all this, the Gospel proposed to them no other terms of acceptance with God, but a worship of him "in spirit and truth," sincere repentance, and perfect submission to the divine laws, the strictest purity of life and manners, and renouncing of all those lusts in which they had formerly walked. How unpalatable a doctrine was this to men so given up to the power of those lusts, as the whole heathen world was at that time. If their philosophers could not be brought to approve it, there could be no hope that the people would relish it, or exchange the ease and indulgence which those religions they were bred up in allowed to their appetites, for one so harsh and severe. But might not St. Paul, in order to gain them, relax that severity? He might have done so, no doubt, and probably would, if he had been an impostor; but it appears, by all his epistles, that he preached it as purely, and enjoined it as strongly, as Jesus himself.

But, supposing they might be persuaded to quit their habitual sensuality for the purity of the Gos-

pel, and to forsake their idolatries, which St. Paul reckons amongst "the works of the flesh," for the spiritual worship of the one invisible God, how were they disposed to receive the doctrine of the salvation of man by the cross of Jesus Christ? Could they, who were bred in notions so contrary to that "great mystery, to that hidden wisdom of God, which none of the princes of this world knew," incline to receive it against the instructions of all their teachers, and the example of all their superiors? Could they, whose gods had almost all been powerful kings, and mighty conquerors; they, who at that very time paid divine honours to the Emperors of Rome, whose only title to deification was the imperial power; could they, I say, reconcile their ideas to a crucified Son of God, to a Redeemer of mankind on the cross? Would they look there for him, "who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: by whom, and for whom, were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers?" Now, most surely, the natural man, (to speak in the words of St. Paul,) "received not these things, for they are foolishness to him; neither could he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." I may, therefore, conclude, that in the enterprise of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul was to contend, not only with the policy and power of the magistrates, and with the interest, credit, and craft of the priests; but also with the prejudices and passions of the people.

I am next to show, that he was to expect no less opposition from the wisdom and pride of the philo-

sophers. And, though some may imagine, that men who pretend to be raised and refined, above vulgar prejudices and vulgar passions, would have been helpful to him in his design, it will be found, upon examination, that, instead of assisting or befriending the Gospel, they were its worst and most irreconcilable enemies. For they had prejudices of their own still more repugnant to the doctrines of Christ than those of the vulgar; more deeply rooted, and more obstinately fixed in their minds. The wisdom upon which they valued themselves, chiefly consisted in vain metaphysical speculations, in logical subtilties, in endless disputes, in high-flown conceits of the perfection and self-sufficiency of human wisdom, in dogmatical positiveness about doubtful opinions, or sceptical doubts about the most clear and certain truths. It must appear, at first sight, that nothing could be more contradictory to the first principles of the Christian religion, than those of the atheistical or sceptical sects, which at that time prevailed very much, both among the Greeks and the Romans; nor shall we find that the theistical sects were much less at enmity with it, when we consider the doctrines they held upon the nature of God and the soul.

But I will not enlarge on a subject, which the most learned Mr. Warburton has handled so well. If it were necessary to enter particularly into this argument, I could easily prove, that there was not one of all the different philosophical sects then upon earth, not even the Platonics themselves, who are thought to favour it most, that did not maintain some opinions fundamentally contrary to those of the Gospel. And in this they all agreed, to explode,

as most unphilosophical, and contrary to every notion that any among them maintained, that great article of the Christian religion, upon which the foundations of it are laid, and without which St. Paul declares to his proselytes, "their faith would be vain," the resurrection of the dead with their bodies, of which resurrection Christ was the first-born. Besides the contrariety of their tenets to those of the Gospel, the pride that was common to all the philosophers, was of itself an almost invincible obstacle against the admission of the evangelical doctrines calculated to humble that pride, and teach them, that, "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." This pride was no less intractable, no less averse to the instructions of Christ, or of his apostles, than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. St. Paul was, therefore, to contend, in his enterprise of converting the Gentiles, with all the opposition that could be made to it by all the different sects of philosophers. And how formidable an opposition this was, let those consider who are acquainted from history with the great credit these sects had obtained at that time in the world—a credit even superior to that of the priests. Whoever pretended to learning or virtue was their disciple; the greatest magistrates, generals, kings, ranged themselves under their discipline, were trained up in their schools, and professed the opinions they taught.

All these sects made it a maxim, not to disturb the popular worship, or established religion; but, under those limitations, they taught very freely whatever they pleased, and no religious opinions were more warmly supported than those they de-

livered were by their followers. The Christian religion at once overturned their several systems, taught a morality more perfect than theirs, and established it upon higher and much stronger foundations, mortified their pride, confounded their learning, discovered their ignorance, ruined their credit. Against such an enemy what would they not do? Would they not exert the whole power of their rhetoric, the whole art of their logic, their influence over the people, their interest with the great, to discredit a novelty so alarming to them all? If St. Paul had nothing to trust to but his own natural faculties, his own understanding, knowledge, and eloquence, could he have hoped to be singly a match for all theirs united against him? Could a teacher, unheard of before, from an obscure and unlearned part of the world, have withstood the authority of Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Zeno, Arcesilaus, Carneades, and all the great names which held the first rank of human wisdom? He might as well have attempted alone, or with the help of Barnabas and Silas, of Timotheus and Titus, to have erected a monarchy upon the ruins of all the several states then in the world, as to have erected Christianity upon the destruction of all the several sects of philosophy which reigned in the minds of the Gentiles among whom he preached, particularly the Greeks and the Romans.

Having thus proved, as I think, that, in the work of converting the Gentiles, St. Paul could have no assistance, but was sure, on the contrary, of the utmost repugnance and opposition to it imaginable,

from the magistrates, from the priests, from the people, and from the philosophers; it necessarily follows, that to succeed in that work, he must have called in some extraordinary aid, some stronger power than that of reason and argument. Accordingly we find, he tells the Corinthians, "that his speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power." And to the Thessalonians he says, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost." It was to the efficacy of the Divine Power that he ascribed all his success in those countries, and wherever else he planted the Gospel of Christ. If that power really went with him, it would enable him to overcome all those difficulties that obstructed his enterprise, but then he was not an impostor. Our inquiry, therefore, must be, Whether (supposing him to have been an impostor) he could, by pretending to miracles, have overcome all those difficulties, and carried on his work with success?

Now, to give miracles, falsely pretended to, any reputation, two circumstances are principally necessary,—an apt disposition in those whom they are designed to impose upon, and a powerful confederacy to carry on and abet the cheat. Both these circumstances, or at least one of them, have always accompanied all the false miracles, ancient and modern, which have obtained any credit among mankind. To both these was owing the general faith of the heathen world in oracles, auspices, auguries, and other impostures, by which the priests combined

with the magistrates, supported the national worship, and deluded a people prepossessed in their favour, and willing to be deceived. Both the same causes, likewise, co-operate in the belief that is given to Popish miracles among those of their own church. But neither of these assisted St. Paul. What prepossessions could there have been in the minds of the Gentiles, either in favour of him, or the doctrines he taught? Or rather, what prepossessions could be stronger than those, which they undoubtedly had against both? If he had remained in Judea, it might have been suggested by unbelievers, that the Jews were a credulous people, apt to seek after miracles, and to afford them an easy belief; and that the fame of those said to be done by Jesus himself, and by his apostles, before Paul declared his conversion, had predisposed their minds, and warmed their imaginations to the admission of others, supposed to be wrought by the same power.

The signal miracle of the apostles speaking with tongues on the day of Pentecost, had made three thousand converts; that of healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, five thousand more. Nay, such was the faith of the multitude, that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, "that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." Here was, therefore, a good foundation laid for Paul to proceed upon, in pretending to similar miraculous works; though the priests and the rulers were hardened against them, the people were inclined to give credit to them, and there was reason to hope for success among them, both at Jerusalem, and in

all the regions belonging to the Jews. But no such dispositions were to be found in the Gentiles. There was among them no matter prepared for imposture to work upon, no knowledge of Christ, no thought of his power, or of the power of those who came in his name. Thus, when at Lystra, St. Paul healed the man who was a cripple from his birth, so far were the people there from supposing that he could be able to do such a thing as an apostle of Christ, Acts xiv. or by any virtue derived from Him, that they took Paul and Barnabas to be gods of their own, come down in the likeness of men, and would have sacrificed to them as such.

Now I ask, Did the citizens of Lystra concur in this matter to the deceiving of themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any conceits of a miraculous power belonging to Paul, which could dispose them to think he worked such a miracle when he did not? As the contrary is evident, so in all other places to which he carried the Gospel, it may be proved to demonstration, that he could find no disposition, no aptness, no bias to aid his imposture, if the miracles, by which he every where confirmed his preaching, had not been true.

On the other hand, let us examine, whether, without the advantage of such an assistance, there was any confederacy strong enough to impose his false miracles upon the Gentiles, who were both unprepared and indisposed to receive them.

The contrary is apparent. He was in no combination with their priests or their magistrates; no sect or party among them gave him any help; all eyes were open and watchful to detect his impostures, all

hands ready to punish him as soon as detected. Had he remained in Judea, he would at least have had many confederates, all the apostles, all the disciples of Christ, at that time pretty numerous; but in preaching to the Gentiles, he was often alone, never with more than two or three companions or followers. Was this a confederacy powerful enough to carry on such a cheat, in so many different parts of the world, against the united opposition of the magistrates, priests, philosophers, people, all combined to detect and expose their frauds?

Let it be also considered, that those upon whom they practised these arts were not a gross or ignorant people, apt to mistake any uncommon operations of nature, or juggling tricks, for miraculous acts. The churches planted by St. Paul were in the most enlightened parts of the world, among the Greeks of Asia and Europe, among the Romans, in the midst of science, philosophy, freedom of thought, and in an age more inquisitively curious into the powers of nature, and less inclined to credit religious frauds, than any before it. Nor were they only the lowest of the people that he converted. Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Paphos, Erastus, chamberlain of Corinth, and Dionysius the Areopagite, were his proselytes.

Upon the whole, it appears beyond contradiction, that his pretension to miracles was not assisted by the *disposition* of those whom he designed to convert by those means, nor by any powerful *confederacy* to carry on, and abet the cheat; without both which concurring circumstances, or one at least, no such pretension was ever supported with any success.

Both these circumstances concurred, even in the late famous miracles supposed to be done at Abbé Paris's tomb. They had not indeed the support of the government, and for that reason appear to deserve more attention than other popish miracles: but they were supported by all the Jansenists, a very powerful and numerous party in France, made up partly of wise and able men, partly of bigots and enthusiasts. All these confederated together to give credit to miracles, said to be worked in behalf of their party, and those who believed them were strongly disposed to that belief. And yet, with these advantages, how easily were they suppressed! only by walling up that part of the church where the tomb of the saint, who was supposed to work them, was placed! Soon after this was done, a paper was fixed on the wall with this inscription: "By command of the king, God is forbidden to work any more miracles here." The pasquinade was a witty one, but the event turned the point of it against the party by which it was made: for, if God had really worked any miracles there, could this absurb prohibition have taken effect? Would He have suffered his purpose to be defeated by building a wall? When all the apostles were shut up in prison to hinder their working miracles, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, and let them out. But the power of Abbé Paris could neither throw down the wall that excluded his votaries, nor operate through that impediment. And yet his miracles are often compared with, and opposed by unbelievers, to those of Christ and his apostles, which is the reason of my having taken this particular notice of them here. But to go back to the times

nearer to St. Paul's:—There is in Lucian an account of a very extraordinary and successful imposture carried on in his days, by one Alexander of Pontus, who introduced a new god into that country, whose prophet he called himself, and in whose name he pretended to miracles, and delivered oracles by which he acquired great wealth and power. All the arts by which this cheat was managed are laid open by Lucian, and nothing can better point out the difference between imposture and truth, than to observe the different conduct of this man and St. Paul. Alexander made no alteration in the religion established in Pontus before; he only grafted his own upon it; and spared no pains to interest in the success of it the whole heathen priesthood, not only in Pontus, but all over the world; sending great numbers of those who came to consult him to other oracles, which were at that time in the highest vogue; by which means he engaged them all to support the reputation of his, and abet his imposture. He spoke with the greatest respect of all the sects of philosophers, except the Epicureans, who, from their principles, he was sure would deride and oppose his fraud; for, though they presumed not to innovate, and overturn established religions, yet they very freely attacked and exposed all innovations that were introduced under the name of religion, and had not the authority of a legal establishment. To get the better of their opposition, as well as that of the Christians, he called in the aid of persecution and force, exciting the people against them, and answering objections with stones.

That he might be sure to get money enough, he

delivered this oracle in the name of his god: "I command you to grace with gifts my prophet and minister; for I have no regard for riches myself, but the greatest for my prophet." And he shared the gains that he had made, which were immense, among an infinite number of associates and instruments, whom he employed in carrying on and supporting his fraud. When any declared themselves to be his enemies, against whom he durst not proceed by open force, he endeavoured to gain them by blandishments, and having got them into his power, to destroy them by secret ways; which arts he practised against Lucian himself. Others he kept in awe and dependence upon him, by detaining in his own hands the written questions they had proposed to his god upon state affairs; and as these generally came from men of the greatest power and rank, his being possessed of them was of infinite service to him, and made him master of all their credit, and of no little part of their wealth.

He obtained the protection and friendship of Rutilianus, a great Roman general, by flattering him with promises of a very long life, and exaltation to deity after his death; and at last, having quite turned his head, enjoined him by an oracle to marry his daughter, whom he pretended to have had by the moon; which command Rutilianus obeyed, and by his alliance secured this impostor from any danger of punishment; the Roman governor of Bithynia and Pontus, excusing himself on that account from doing justice upon him, when Lucian and several others offered themselves to be his accusers.

He never quitted that ignorant and barbarous

country, which he had made choice of at first as the fittest to play his tricks in undiscovered; but, residing himself among those superstitious and credulous people, extended his fame to a great distance by the emissaries which he employed all over the world, especially at Rome, who did not pretend themselves to work any miracles, but only promulgated his, and gave him intelligence of all that it was useful for him to know.

These were the methods by which this remarkable fraud was conducted, every one of which is directly opposite to all those used by St. Paul in preaching the Gospel; and yet such methods alone could give success to a cheat of this kind. I will not mention the many debaucheries and wicked enormities committed by this false prophet under the mask of religion, which is another characteristical difference between him and St. Paul; nor the ambiguous answers, cunning evasions, and juggling artifices which he used, in all which it is easy to see the evident marks of an imposture, as well as in the objects he plainly appears to have had in view. That which I chiefly insist on is, the strong confederacy with which he took care to support his pretension to miraculous powers, and the apt disposition in those he imposed upon to concur and assist in deceiving themselves; advantages entirely wanting to the apostles of Christ.

From all this I think it may be concluded, that no human means employed by St. Paul, in his design of converting the Gentiles, were, or could be adequate to the great difficulties he had to contend with, or to the success that we know attended his work: and

we can in reason ascribe that success to no other cause, but the power of God going along with and aiding his ministry, because no other was equal to the effect.

Having then shown that St. Paul had no rational motives to become an apostle of Christ, without being himself convinced of the truth of that gospel he preached, and that, had he engaged in such an imposture without any rational motives, he would have had no possible means to carry it on with any success; having also brought reasons of a very strong nature to make it appear, that the success he undoubtedly had in preaching the gospel was an effect of the Divine Power attending his ministry, I might rest all my proof of the Christian religion being a divine revelation upon the arguments drawn from this head alone. But, to consider this subject in all possible lights, I shall pursue the proposition which I set out with through each of its several parts; and having proved, as I hope, to the conviction of any impartial man, that St. Paul was not an impostor, who said what he knew to be false with an intent to deceive, I come next to consider, whether he was an *enthusiast*, who, by the force of an overheated imagination, imposed upon himself.

Now, these are the ingredients of which *enthusiasm* is generally composed: great heat of temper, melancholy, ignorance, credulity, and vanity or self-conceit. That the first of these qualities was in St. Paul, may be concluded from that fervour of zeal with which he acted, both as a Jew and Christian, in maintaining that which he thought to be right; and hence I suppose, as well as from the impossibility of his having been an impostor, some un-

believers have chosen to consider him as an enthusiast. But this quality alone will not be sufficient to prove him to have been so, in the opinion of any reasonable man. The same temper has been common to others, who undoubtedly were not enthusiasts, to the Gracchi, to Cato, to Brutus, to many more among the best and wisest of men. Nor does it appear that this disposition had such a mastery over the mind of St. Paul, that he was not able, at all times, to rule and control it by the dictates of reason. On the contrary, he was so much the master of it, as in matters of an indifferent nature, to "become all things to all men," bending his notions and manners to theirs, so far as his duty to God would permit, with the most pliant condescension; a conduct neither compatible with the stiffness of a bigot, nor the violent impulses of fanatic delusions. His zeal was eager and warm, but tempered with prudence, and even with the civilities and decorums of life, as appears by his behaviour to Agrippa, Festus, and Felix; not the blind, inconsiderate, indecent zeal of an enthusiast.

Let us now see if any one of those other qualities which I have laid down, as disposing the mind to enthusiasm, and as being characteristical of it, belong to St. Paul. First, as to melancholy, which of all dispositions of body or mind is most prone to enthusiasm, it neither appears by his writings, nor by any thing told of him in the Acts of the Apostles, nor by any other evidence, that St. Paul was inclined to it more than other men. Though he was full of remorse for his former ignorant persecution of the Church of Christ, we read of no gloomy

penances, no extravagant mortifications, such as the Bramins, Jaugues, the monks of La Trappe, and other melancholy enthusiasts, inflict on themselves. His holiness only consisted in the simplicity of a good life, and the unwearied performance of those apostolical duties to which he was called. The sufferings he met with on that account he cheerfully bore, and even rejoiced in them for the love of Christ Jesus, but he brought none on himself; we find, on the contrary, that he pleaded the privilege of a Roman citizen to avoid being whipped. I could mention more instances of his having used the best methods that prudence could suggest, to escape danger, and shun persecution, whenever it could be done without betraying the duty of his office, or the honour of God.*

Compare with this the conduct of Francis of

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* A remarkable instance of this appears in his conduct among the Athenians. There was at Athens a law, which made it capital to introduce or teach any new gods in their state. Therefore, when Paul was preaching Jesus and the resurrection to the Athenians, some of them carried him before the court of Areopagus, the ordinary judges of criminal matters, and in a particular manner intrusted with the care of religion, as having broken this law, and being "a setter forth of strange gods." Now, in this case, an impostor would have retracted his doctrine to save his life, and an enthusiast would have lost his life without trying to save it by innocent means. St. Paul did neither the one nor the other; he availed himself of an altar which he had found in the city, inscribed "To the unknown God," and pleaded, that he did not propose to them the worship of any new god, but only explained to them one whom their government had already received: "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." By this he avoided the law, and escaped being condemned by the Areopagus, without departing in the least from the truth of the Gospel, or violating the honour of God. An admirable proof, in my opinion, of the good sense with which he acted, and one that shows there was no mixture of fanaticism in his religion.

Assisi, of Ignatius Loyola, and other enthusiasts sainted by Rome, it will be found the reverse of St. Paul's. "He wished indeed to die, and be with Christ," but such a wish is no proof of melancholy, or of enthusiasm; it only proves his conviction of the divine truths he preached, and of the happiness laid up for him in those blessed abodes which had been shown to him even in this life. Upon the whole, neither in his actions, nor in the instructions he gave to those under his charge, is there any tincture of melancholy, which yet is so essential a characteristic of enthusiasm, that I have scarcely ever heard of any enthusiast, ancient or modern, in whom some very evident marks of it did not appear.

As to *ignorance*, which is another ground of enthusiasm, St. Paul was so far from it, that he appears to have been master, not of the Jewish learning alone, but of the Greek. And this is one reason why he is less liable to the imputation of having been an enthusiast than the other apostles, though none of them were such any more than he, as may, by other arguments, be invincibly proved.

I have mentioned *credulity* as another characteristic and cause of enthusiasm, which, that it was not in St. Paul, the history of his life undeniably shows. For, on the contrary, he seems to have been slow and hard of belief in the extremest degree, having paid no regard to all the miracles done by our Saviour, the fame of which he could not be a stranger to, as he lived in Jerusalem, nor to that signal one done after his resurrection, and in his name, by Peter and John, upon the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple; nor to the evidence given in

consequence of it by Peter, in presence of the high-priest, the rulers, elders, and scribes, that " Christ was raised from the dead." He must also have known, that when all the apostles had been " shut up in the common prison, and the high-priest, the council, and all the senate of the children of Israel, had sent their officers to bring them before them, the officers came and found them not in prison, but returned," and made this report, " The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but, when we had opened, we found no man within." And that the council was immediately told, " that the men they had put in prison were standing in the temple, and teaching the people." And that being brought thence before the council, they had spoken these memorable words: " We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him." All this he resisted, and was consenting to the murder of Stephen, who preached the same thing, and evidenced it by miracles. So that his mind, far from being disposed to a credulous faith, or a too easy reception of any miracle worked in proof of the Christian religion, appears to have been barred against it by the most obstinate prejudices, as much as any man's could possibly be; and hence we may fairly conclude, that nothing less than the irresisti-

ble evidence of his own senses, clear from all possibility of doubt, could have overcome his unbelief.

Vanity, or *self-conceit*, is another circumstance that for the most part prevails in the character of an enthusiast. It leads men of a warm temper, and religious turn, to think themselves worthy of the special regard, and extraordinary favours of God; and the breath of that inspiration to which they pretend, is often no more than the wind of this vanity, which puffs them up to such extravagant imaginations. This strongly appears in the writings and lives of some enthusiastical heretics in the mystics, both ancient and modern, in many founders of orders and saints, both male and female, amongst the Papists. All the divine communications, illuminations, and ecstasies, to which they have pretended, evidently sprung from much self-conceit, working together with the vapours of melancholy upon a warm imagination; and this is one reason, besides the contagious nature of melancholy, or fear, that makes enthusiasm so very catching among weak minds. Such are most strongly disposed to vanity; and, when they see others pretend to extraordinary gifts, are apt to flatter themselves that they may partake of them as well as those whose merit they think no more than their own. Vanity, therefore, may justly be deemed a principal source of enthusiasm. But that St. Paul was as free from it as any man, I think may be gathered from all that we see in his writings, or know of his life.—Throughout his Epistles there is not one word that savours of vanity, nor is any action recorded of him, in which the least mark of it appears.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians he calls himself "less than the least of all saints." And to the Corinthians he says, "he is the least of the apostles, and not meet to be called an apostle, because he had persecuted the church of God." In his Epistle to Timothy he says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting."

It is true, indeed, that in another Epistle he tells the Corinthians, "That he was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles." But the occasion which drew from him these words must be considered. A false teacher, by faction and calumny, had brought his apostleship in question among the Corinthians. Against such an attack, not to have asserted his apostolical dignity, would have been a betraying of the office and duty committed to him by God. He was therefore constrained to do himself justice, and not let down that character, upon the authority of which, the whole success and efficacy of his ministry among them depended. But how did he do it? Not with that wantonness which a vain man indulges, when he can get any opportunity of commending himself; not with a pompous detail of all the amazing miracles which he had performed in different parts of the world, though he had so fair an occasion of doing it; but with a modest and simple exposition of his abundant labours and sufferings in preaching the

gospel, and barely reminding them, " that the signs of an apostle had been wrought among them in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds." Could he say less than this? Is not such boasting humility itself? And yet for this he makes many apologies, expressing the greatest uneasiness in being obliged to speak thus of himself, even in his own vindication. When, in the same Epistle, and for the same purpose, he mentions the vision he had of heaven, how modestly does he do it! Not in his own name, but in the third person: " I knew a man in Christ, &c. caught up into the third heaven." And immediately after he adds, " but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me." How contrary is this to a spirit of vanity?— How different from the practice of enthusiastic pretenders to raptures and visions, who never think they can dwell long enough upon those subjects, but fill whole volumes with their accounts of them! Yet St. Paul is not satisfied with this forbearance; he adds the confession of some infirmity, which he tells the Corinthians was given to him as an allay, " that he might not be above measure exalted through the abundance of his revelations." I would also observe, that he says this rapture or vision of Paradise, happened to him above fourteen years before. Now, had it been the effect of a mere enthusiastical fancy, can it be supposed that, in so long a period of time, he would not have had many more raptures of the same kind? Would not his imagination have been perpetually carrying him to heaven, as we find St. Theresa, St. Bridget, and St.

Catharine were carried by theirs? And if vanity had been predominant in him, would he have remained fourteen years in absolute silence upon so great a mark of the divine favour? No: we should certainly have seen his Epistles filled with nothing else but long accounts of these visions, conferences with angels, with Christ, with God Almighty, mystical unions with God, and all that we read in the works of those sainted enthusiasts, whom I have mentioned before. But he only mentions this vision in answer to the false teacher who had disputed his apostolical power, and comprehends it all in three sentences, with many excuses for being compelled to make any mention of it at all. Nor does he take any merit to himself, even from the success of those apostolical labours which he principally boasts of in this Epistle. For in a former one to the same church, he writes thus, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." And in another place of the same Epistle he says, "By the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

I think it needless to give more instances of the modesty of St. Paul. Certain I am, not one can be given that bears any colour of vanity, or that vanity in particular which so strongly appears in all

enthusiasts, of setting their imaginary gifts above those virtues which make the essence of true religion, and the real excellence of a good man, or, in the Scripture phrase, of a saint. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians he has these words: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Is this the language of enthusiasm? Did ever enthusiast prefer that universal benevolence which comprehends all moral virtues, and which (as appears by the following verses) is meant by charity here; did ever enthusiast, I say, prefer that benevolence to faith and to miracles, to those religious opinions which he had embraced, and to those supernatural graces and gifts which he imagined he had acquired, nay, even to the merit of martyrdom? Is it not the genius of enthusiasm to set moral virtues infinitely below the merit of faith; and, of all moral virtues, to value that least which is most particularly enforced by St. Paul—a spirit of candour, moderation, and peace? Certainly neither the temper, nor the opinions of a man subject to fanatic delusions, are to be found in this passage; but it may be justly concluded, that he who could esteem the value of charity so much above miraculous gifts, could not have pretended to any such gifts if he had them not in reality.

Since then it is manifest, from the foregoing examination, that in St. Paul's disposition and character those qualities do not occur which seem to be necessary to form an enthusiast, it must be reasonable to conclude he was none. But allowing, for argument's sake, that all those qualities were to be found in him, or that the heat of his temper alone could be a sufficient foundation to support such a suspicion; I shall endeavour to prove, that he could not have imposed on himself by any power of enthusiasm, either in regard to the miracle that caused his conversion, or to the consequential effects of it, or to some other circumstances to which he bears testimony in his epistles.

The power of imagination in enthusiastical minds, is, no doubt, very strong, but it always acts in conformity to the opinions imprinted upon it at the time of its working, and can no more act against them, than a rapid river can carry a boat against the current of its own stream. Now, nothing can be more certain, than that when Saul set out for Damascus with an authority from the chief-priests, to bring the Christians which were there bound to Jerusalem, an authority solicited by himself, and granted to him at his own earnest desire, his mind was strongly possessed with opinions against Christ and his followers. To give those opinions a more active force, his passions at that time concurred, being inflamed in the highest degree by the irritating consciousness of his past conduct towards them, the pride of supporting a part he had voluntarily engaged in, and the credit he found it had procured him among the chief-priests and rulers, whose commission he bore.

If, in such a state and temper of mind, an enthusiastical man had imagined he saw a vision from heaven denouncing the anger of God against the Christians, and commanding him to persecute them without any mercy, it might be accounted for by the natural power of enthusiasm. But that in the very instant of his being engaged in the fiercest and hottest persecution against them, no circumstance having happened to change his opinions, or alter the bent of his disposition, he should at once imagine himself called by a heavenly vision to be the Apostle of Christ, whom but a moment before he deemed an impostor and a blasphemer, that had been justly put to death on the cross, is in itself wholly incredible, and so far from being a probable effect of enthusiasm, that just a contrary effect must have been naturally produced by that cause. The warmth of his temper carried him violently another way; and whatever delusions his imagination could raise to impose on his reason, must have been raised at that time agreeably to the notions imprinted upon it, and by which it was heated to a degree of enthusiasm, not in direct contradiction to all those notions, while they remained in their full force.

This is so clear a proposition, that I might rest the whole argument entirely upon it: but still farther to show that this vision could not be a phantom of St. Paul's own creating, I beg leave to observe, that he was not alone when he saw it; there were many others in company, whose minds were no better disposed than his to the Christian faith. Could it be possible that the imaginations of all these men should at the same time be so strangely affected, as

to make them believe that they saw "a great light shining about them, above the brightness of the sun at noon-day," and heard the sound of a voice from heaven, though not the words which it spake, when in reality they neither saw, nor heard any such thing? Could they be so infatuated with this conceit of their fancy, as to fall down from their horses together with Saul, and be speechless, through fear, when nothing had happened extraordinary either to them or to him; especially considering that this apparition did not happen in the night, when the senses are more easily imposed upon, but at mid-day? If a sudden frenzy had seized upon Saul, from any distemper of body or mind, can we suppose his whole company, men of different constitutions and understandings, to have been at once affected in the same manner with him, so that not the distemper alone, but the effects of it should exactly agree? If all had gone mad together, would not the frenzy of some have taken a different turn, and presented to them different objects? This supposition is so contrary to nature, and all possibility, that unbelief must find some other solution, or give up the point.

I shall suppose, then, in order to try to account for this vision without a miracle, that as Saul and his company were journeying along in their way to Damascus, an extraordinary meteor did really happen, which cast a great light, as some meteors will do, at which they being affrighted, fell to the ground in the manner related. This might be possible; and fear, grounded on ignorance of such phenomena, might make them imagine it to be a vision from God. Nay, even the voice or sound they heard in the air, might

be an explosion attending this meteor, or at least there are those who would rather recur to such a supposition as this, however incredible, than acknowledge the miracle. But how will this account for the distinct words heard by St. Paul, to which he made answer? How will it account for what followed upon it when he came to Damascus, agreeably to the sense of those words which he heard? How came Ananias to go to him there, and say, "He was chosen by God to know his will, and see that Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth? Or why did he propose to him to be baptized? What connection was there between the meteor which Saul had seen, and these words of Ananias? Will it be said that Ananias was skilful enough to take advantage of the fright he was in at that appearance, in order to make him a Christian? But could Ananias inspire him with a vision in which he saw him before he came? If that vision was the effect of imagination, how was it verified so exactly in fact? But allowing that he dreamt by chance of Ananias's coming, and that Ananias came by chance too; or, if you please, that, having heard of his dream, he came to take advantage of that, as well as of the meteor which Saul had seen, will this get over the difficulty? No: there was more to be done. Saul was struck blind, and had been so for three days. Now, had this blindness been natural, from the effects of a meteor or lightning upon him, it would not have been possible for Ananias to heal it, as we find that he did, merely by putting his hands on him and speaking a few words. This undoubtedly surpassed the power of nature; and if this was a miracle, it proves the

other to have been a miracle too, and a miracle done by the same Jesus Christ. For Ananias, when he healed Saul, spoke to him thus: "Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, has sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." And that he saw Christ both now and after this time, appears not only by what he relates Acts xxii. 17, 18. but by other passages in his epistles, 1 Cor. ix. 1. xvi. 8. Acts ix. 17. From *him* (as he asserts in many places of his epistles) he learned the gospel by immediate revelation, and by him he was sent to the Gentiles, Acts xxii. 21. xxiii. 11. Among those Gentiles "from Jerusalem, and round about to Illyricum," he preached the gospel of Christ, "with mighty signs and wonders wrought by the power of the Spirit of God, to make them obedient to his preaching," as he testifies himself in his Epistle to the Romans, and of which a particular account is given to us in the Acts of the Apostles; signs and wonders indeed, above any power of nature to work, or of imposture to counterfeit, or of enthusiasm to imagine. Now, does not such a series of miraculous acts, all consequential to, and dependent upon, the first revelation, put the truth of that revelation beyond all possibility of doubt or deceit? And if he could so have imposed on himself as to think that he worked them when he did not, (which supposition cannot be admitted, if he was not all that time quite out of his senses,) how could so distempered an enthusiast make such a progress, as we know that he did, in converting the Gentile world? If the difficulties which have been shown to have obstructed that work

were such as the ablest impostor could not overcome, how much more insurmountable were they to a madman? It is a much harder task for unbelievers to account for the success of St. Paul, in preaching the Gospel, upon the supposition of his having been an enthusiast, than of his having been an impostor. Neither of these suppositions can ever account for it; but the impossibility is more glaringly strong in this case than the other. I could enter into a particular examination of all the miracles recorded in the Acts to have been done by St. Paul, and show that they were not of a nature in which enthusiasm, either in him, or the persons he worked them upon, or the spectators, could have any part. I will mention only a few:—

When he told Elymas the sorcerer, at Paphos, before the Roman deputy, that "the hand of God was upon him, and he should be blind, not seeing the sun for a season; and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand"—had enthusiasm in the doer or sufferer any share in this act? If Paul, as an enthusiast, had thrown out this menace, and the effect had not followed, instead of converting the deputy, as we are told that he did, he would have drawn on himself his rage and contempt. But the effect upon Elymas could not be caused by any enthusiasm in Paul; much less can it be imputed to an enthusiastic belief in that person himself, of his being struck blind, when he was not, by those words of a man whose preaching he strenuously and bitterly opposed. Nor can we ascribe the conversion of Sergius, which happened upon it, to any enthusiasm.

A Roman proconsul was not very likely to be an enthusiast; but had he been one, he must have been bigotted to his own gods, and so much the less inclined to believe any miraculous power in St. Paul. When at Troas, a young man named Eutychus "fell down from a high window," while Paul was preaching, "and was taken up dead,"—could any enthusiasm, either in Paul or the congregation there present, make them believe, that by that apostle's falling upon him, and embracing him, he was restored to life? Or, could he who was so restored contribute any thing to it himself, by any power of his own imagination? When, in the Isle of Melita, where St. Paul was shipwrecked, there came a viper and fastened on his hand, which he shook off, and felt no harm, was that an effect of enthusiasm? An enthusiast might perhaps have been mad enough to hope for safety against the bite of a viper without any remedy being applied to it, but would that hope have prevented his death? Or were the barbarous islanders, to whom this apostle was an absolute stranger, prepared by enthusiasm to expect and believe that any miracle would be worked to preserve him? On the contrary, when they saw the viper hang on his hand, they said among themselves, "No doubt, this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." I will add no more instances: these are sufficient to show, that the miracles told of St. Paul, can no more be ascribed to enthusiasm than to imposture.

But, moreover, the power of working miracles was not confined to St. Paul, it was also communi-

cated to the churches he planted in different parts of the world. In many parts of his First Epistle he tells the Corinthians, that they had among them many miraculous graces and gifts, and gives them directions for the more orderly use of them in their assemblies. Now, I ask, Whether all he said upon that head is to be ascribed to enthusiasm? If the Corinthians knew that they had among them no such miraculous powers, they must have regarded the author of that Epistle as a man out of his senses, instead of revering him as an apostle of God.

If, for instance, a Quaker should, in a meeting of his own sect, tell all the persons assembled there, that, "to some among them was given the gift of healing by the Spirit of God, to others the working of other miracles, to others divers kinds of tongues," they would undoubtedly account him a madman, because they pretend to no such gifts. If, indeed, they were only told by him that they were inspired by the Spirit of God, in a certain ineffable manner, which they alone could understand, but which did not discover itself by any outward, distinct operations, or signs, they might mistake the impulse of enthusiasm for the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but they could not believe, against the conviction of their own minds, that they spoke tongues they did not speak, or healed distempers they did not heal, or worked other miracles, when they worked none. If it be said, the Corinthians might pretend to these powers, though the Quakers do not, I ask, Whether in that pretension they were impostors, or only enthusiasts? If they were impostors, and St. Paul was also such, how ridiculous was it for him to advise

them, in an epistle written only to them, and for their own use, not to value themselves too highly upon those gifts; to pray for one rather than another, and prefer charity to them all! Do associates in fraud talk such a language to one another? But if we suppose their pretension to all those gifts was an effect of enthusiasm, let us consider how it was possible that he and they could be so cheated by that enthusiasm, as to imagine they had such powers when they had not.

Suppose that enthusiasm could make a man think, that he was able by a word or a touch to give sight to the blind, motion to the lame, or life to the dead: would that conceit of his make the blind see, the lame walk, or the dead revive? And if it did not, how could he persist in such an opinion, or, upon his persisting, escape being shut up for a madman? But such a madness could not infect so many at once, as St. Paul supposes at Corinth to have been endowed with the gift of healing, or any other miraculous power. One of the miracles which they pretended to, was the speaking of languages they never had learned. And St. Paul says, he possessed this gift more than them all. If this had been a delusion of fancy, if they had spoken only gibberish, or unmeaning sounds, it would soon have appeared when they came to make use of it where it was necessary, namely, in converting of those who understood not any language they naturally spoke. St. Paul particularly, who travelled so far upon that design, and had such occasion to use it, must soon have discovered that this imaginary gift of the Spirit was no gift at all, but a ridiculous instance of frenzy,

which had possessed both him and them. But if those he spoke to in divers tongues understood what he said, and were converted to Christ by that means, how could it be a delusion? Of all the miracles recorded in Scripture, none are more clear from any possible imputation of being the effect of an enthusiastic imagination than this. For how could any man think that he had it, who had it not; or if he did think so, not be undeceived when he came to put his gift to the proof? Accordingly, I do not find such a power to have been ever pretended to by any enthusiast, ancient or modern.

If, then, St. Paul and the Church of Corinth were not deceived in ascribing to themselves this miraculous power, but really had it, there is the strongest reason to think, that neither were they deceived in the other powers to which they pretended: as the same Spirit which gave them that, equally could, and probably would, give them the others, to serve the same holy ends for which that was given; and by consequence St. Paul was no enthusiast in what he wrote upon that head to the Corinthians, nor in other similar instances, where he ascribes to himself, or to the churches he founded, any supernatural graces and gifts. Indeed they who would impute to imagination effects such as those which St. Paul imputes to the power of God attending his mission, must ascribe to imagination the same omnipotence which he ascribes to God.

Having thus, I flatter myself, satisfactorily shown that St. Paul could not be an enthusiast, who by the force of an over-heated imagination imposed on himself, I am next to inquire whether he was deceived

by the fraud of others, and whether all that he said of himself can be imputed to the power of that deceit? But I need say little to show the absurdity of this supposition. It was morally impossible for the disciples of Christ to conceive such a thought as that of turning his persecutor into his Apostle, and to do this by a fraud in the very instant of his greatest fury against them and their Lord. But could they have been so extravagant as to conceive such a thought, it was physically impossible for them to execute it in the manner we find his conversion to have been effected. Could they produce a light in the air, which at mid-day was brighter than that of the sun! Could they make Saul hear words from out of that light, which were not heard by the rest of the company? Could they make him blind for three days after that vision, and then make scales fall off from his eyes, and restore him to his sight by a word? Beyond dispute, no fraud could do these things; but much less still could the fraud of others produce those miracles subsequent to his conversion, in which he was not passive, but active, which he did himself, and appeals to in his epistles as proofs of his divine mission. I shall then take it for granted that he was not deceived by the fraud of others, and that what he said of himself cannot be imputed to the power of that deceit, no more than to wilful imposture, or to enthusiasm; and then it follows that what he related to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all really happen, and therefore, the Christian Religion is a Divine Revelation.

That this conclusion is fairly and undeniably

drawn from the premises, I think must be owned, unless some probable cause can be assigned, to account for those facts so authentically related in the Acts of the Apostles, and attested in his epistles by St. Paul himself, other than any of those which I have considered; and this I am confident cannot be done. It must be therefore accounted for by the power of God. That God should work miracles for the establishment of a most holy religion, which, from the insuperable difficulties that stood in the way of it, could not have established itself without such an assistance, is no way repugnant to human reason: but that without any miracle such things should have happened as no adequate natural causes can be assigned for, is what human reason cannot believe.

To impute them to magic, or the power of demons, (which was the resource of the heathens and Jews against the notoriety of the miracles performed by Christ and his disciples,) is by no means agreeable to the notions of those who in this age disbelieve Christianity. It will, therefore, be needless to show the weakness of that supposition; but that supposition itself is no inconsiderable argument of the truth of the facts. Next to the Apostles and Evangelists, the strongest witnesses of the undeniable force of that truth are Celsus and Julian, and other ancient opponents of the Christian religion, who were obliged to solve what they could not contradict, by such an irrational and absurd imagination.

The dispute was not then between faith and reason, but between religion and superstition. Superstition ascribed to cabalistical names, or magical secrets, such operations as carried along with them

evident marks of the Divine Power. Religion ascribed them to God, and reason declared itself on that side of the question. Upon what grounds, then, can we now overturn that decision? Upon what grounds can we reject the unquestionable testimony given by St. Paul, that he was called by God to be a disciple and apostle of Christ? It has been shown, that we cannot impute it either to enthusiasm or fraud; how shall we then resist the conviction of such a proof? Does the doctrine he preached contain any precepts against the law of morality, that natural law written by God in the hearts of mankind? If it did, I confess that none of the arguments I have used could prove such a doctrine to come from Him. But this is so far from being the case, that even those who reject Christianity as a Divine Revelation, acknowledge the morals delivered by Christ and by his Apostles to be worthy of God. Is it then on account of the mysteries in the Gospel, that the facts are denied, though supported by evidence, which, in all other cases, would be allowed to contain the clearest conviction, and cannot in this be rejected, without reducing the mind to a state of absolute scepticism, and overturning those rules by which we judge of all evidence, and of the truth or credibility of all other facts? But this is plainly to give up the use of our understanding where we are able to use it most properly, in order to apply it to things of which it is not a competent judge. The motives and reasons upon which Divine Wisdom may think proper to act, as well as the manner in which it acts, must often lie out of the reach of our understanding; but the motives and reasons of

human actions, and the manner in which they are performed, are all in the sphere of human knowledge, and upon them we may judge, with a well-grounded confidence, when they are fairly proposed to our consideration.

It is incomparably more probable, that a Revelation from God, concerning the ways of his providence, should contain in it matters above the capacity of our minds to comprehend, than that St. Paul, or indeed any of the other Apostles, should have acted, as we know that they did, upon any other foundations than certain knowledge of Christ's being risen from the dead; or should have succeeded in the work they undertook, without the aid of miraculous powers. To the former of these propositions, I may give my assent without any direct opposition of reason to faith; but in admitting the latter, I must believe against all those probabilities that are the rational grounds of assent.

Nor do they who reject the Christian religion, because of the difficulties which occur in its mysteries, consider how far that objection will go against other systems, both of religion and of philosophy, which they themselves profess to admit. There are in Deism itself, the most simple of all religious opinions, several difficulties, for which human reason can but ill account; which may, therefore, be not improperly styled, "articles of faith." Such is the origin of evil under the government of an all-good and all-powerful God; a question so hard, that the inability of solving it in a manner satisfactory to their apprehensions, has driven some of the greatest philosophers into the monstrous and senseless opinions

of Manicheism and Atheism.—Such is the reconciling the prescience of God with the free-will of man, which, after much thought on the subject, Mr. Locke fairly confesses he could not do, though he acknowledged both; and what Mr. Locke could not do, in reasoning upon subjects of a metaphysical nature, I am apt to think, few men, if any, can hope to perform.—Such is also the creation of the world at any supposed time, or the eternal production of it from God; it being almost equally hard, according to mere philosophical notions, either to admit that the goodness of God could remain unexerted through all eternity before the time of such a creation, let it be set back ever so far, or to conceive an eternal production, which words, so applied, are inconsistent and contradictory terms; the solution commonly given by a comparison to the emanation of light from the sun not being adequate to it, or just; for light is a quality inherent in fire, and naturally emanating from it: whereas matter is not a quality inherent or emanating from the Divine Essence, but of a different substance and nature, and if not independent and self-existing, must have been created by a mere act of the Divine Will; and if created, then not eternal; the idea of creation implying a time when the substance created did not exist. But, if to get rid of this difficulty, we have recourse, as many of the ancient philosophers had, to the independent existence of matter, then we must admit two self-existing principles, which is quite inconsistent with genuine Theism, or natural reason. Nay, could that be admitted, it would not yet clear up the doubt, unless we suppose, not only the eternal existence of matter, independent of God, but

that it was from eternity, in the order and beauty we see it in now, without any agency of the Divine Power; otherwise the same difficulty will always occur, why it was not before put in that order and state of perfection; or how the goodness of God could so long remain in a state of inaction, unexerted and unemployed. For, were the time of such an exertion of it put back ever so far, if, instead of five or six thousand years, we were to suppose millions of millions of ages to have passed since the world* was reduced out of a chaos to an harmonious and regular form, still a whole eternity must have preceded that date, during which the Divine attributes did not exert themselves in that beneficent work, so suitable to them, that the conjectures of human reason can find no cause for its being delayed.

But because of these difficulties, or any other that may occur in the system of Deism, no wise man will deny the being of God, or his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power, which are proved by such evidence as carries the clearest and strongest conviction, and cannot be refused without involving the mind in far greater difficulties, even in downright absurdities and impossibilities. The only part, therefore, that can be taken is, to account in the best manner that our weak reason is able to do, for such seeming objections; and where that fails, to acknowledge its weakness, and acquiesce under the certainty, that our very imperfect knowledge, or judgment, cannot be the measure of the Divine Wisdom, or the universal

* By the world, I do not mean this earth alone, but the whole material universe, with all its inhabitants. Even created spirits fall under the same reasoning; for they must also have had a beginning, and before that beginning an eternity must have preceded.

standard of truth. So likewise it is with respect to the Christian religion. Some difficulties occur in that Revelation, which human reason can hardly clear; but as the truth of it stands upon evidence so strong and convincing, that it cannot be denied without much greater difficulties than those that attend the belief of it, as I have before endeavoured to prove, we ought not to reject it upon such objections, however mortifying they may be to our pride. That indeed would have all things made plain to us; but God has thought proper to proportion our knowledge to our wants, not our pride. All that concerns our duty is clear; and as to other points, either of natural or revealed religion, if he has left some obscurities in them, is that any reasonable cause of complaint? Not to rejoice in the benefit of what he has graciously allowed us to know, from a presumptuous disgust at our incapacity of knowing more, is as absurd, as it would be to refuse to walk, because we cannot fly.

From the arrogant ignorance of metaphysical reasonings, aiming at matters above our knowledge, arose all the speculative impiety, and many of the worst superstitions of the old heathen world, before the Gospel was preached to bring men back again to the primitive faith; and from the same source have since flowed some of the greatest corruptions of the evangelical truth, and the most inveterate prejudices against it: an effect just as natural, as for our eyes to grow weak, and even blind, by being strained to look at objects too distant, or not made for them to see.

Are, then, our intellectual faculties of no use in religion? Yes; undoubtedly of the most necessary use, when rightly employed. The proper employment

of them, is to distinguish its genuine doctrines, from others erroneously or corruptly ascribed to it; to consider the importance and purport of them, with the connection they bear to one another; but, first of all, to examine, with the strictest attention, the evidence by which religion is proved, internal as well as external. If the external evidence be convincingly strong, and there is no internal proof of its falsehood, but much to support and confirm its truth, then, surely, no difficulties ought to prevent our giving a full assent and belief to it. It is our duty, indeed, to endeavour to find the best solutions we can to them; but where no satisfactory ones are to be found, it is no less our duty to acquiesce with humility, and believe that to be right which we know is above us, and belonging to a wisdom superior to ours.

Nor let it be said, that this will be an argument for the admitting all doctrines, however absurd, that may have been grafted upon the Christian faith. Those which can plainly be proved not to belong to it, fall not under the reasoning I have laid down (and certainly none do belong to it, which contradict either our clear, intuitive knowledge, or the evident principles and dictates of reason.) I speak only of difficulties which attend the belief of the Gospel in some of its pure and essential doctrines, plainly and evidently delivered there, which, being made known to us by a revelation supported by proofs, that our reason ought to admit, and not being such things as it can certainly know to be false, must be received by it as objects of faith, though they are such as it could not have discovered by any natural means,

and such as are difficult to be conceived, or satisfactorily explained, by its limited powers. If the glorious light of the gospel be sometimes overcast with clouds of doubt, so is the light of our reason too. But shall we deprive ourselves of the advantage of either, because those clouds cannot, perhaps, be entirely removed while we remain in this mortal life? Shall we obstinately and frowardly shut our eyes against "that day-spring from on high that has visited us," because we are not as yet able to bear the full blaze of his beams? Indeed, not even in heaven itself, not in the highest state of perfection to which a finite being can ever attain, will all the councils of Providence, all the height and the depth of the infinite wisdom of God, be ever disclosed or understood. Faith, even then will be necessary; and there will be mysteries which cannot be penetrated by the most exalted archangel, and truths which cannot be known by him otherwise than from Revelation, or believed upon any other ground of assent than a submissive confidence in the Divine Wisdom. What, then, shall man presume that his weak and narrow understanding is sufficient to guide him into all truth, without any need of revelation or faith? Shall he complain that "the ways of God are not like his ways, and past his finding out?" True Philosophy, as well as true Christianity, would teach us a wiser and modester part. It would teach us to be content within those bounds which God has assigned to us, "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

ON THE

EVIDENCES

OF

CHRISTIANITY.

BY

PHILIP DODDRIDGE, D. D.

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DISCOURSE I.

THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY BRIEFLY STATED, AND THE NEW TESTAMENT PROVED TO BE GENUINE.

2 Peter i. 16.

"We have not followed cunningly-devised fables."

It is undoubtedly a glory to our age and country, that the nature of moral virtue has been so clearly stated, and the practice of it so strongly enforced, by the views of its native beauty and beneficial consequences, both to private persons and societies. Perhaps in this respect hardly any nation or time has equalled, certainly few, if any, have exceeded our own. Yet I fear I might add, there have been few ages or countries where vice has more generally triumphed, in its most audacious and, in other respects, most odious forms.

This may well appear a surprising case, and it will surely be worth our while to inquire into the causes of so strange a circumstance. I cannot now

enter into a particular detail of them. But I am persuaded none is more considerable than that unhappy disregard, either to the gospel in general, or to its most peculiar and essential truths, which is so visible amongst us, and which appears to be continually growing. It is plain, that, like some of old, who thought and professed themselves the wisest of mankind, or, in other words, the freest thinkers of their age, multitudes among us have not liked to retain God and his truths in their knowledge; and it is therefore the less to be wondered at, if God has given them up to a reprobate mind, to the most infamous lusts and enormities, and to a depth of degeneracy, which, while it is in part the natural consequence, is in part also the just but dreadful punishment of their apostacy from the faith. And I am persuaded that those who do indeed wish well to the cause of public virtue, as every true Christian most certainly does, cannot serve it more effectually than by endeavouring to establish men in the belief of the gospel in general, and to affect their hearts with its most distinguishing truths.

The latter of these is our frequent employment, and is what I have particularly attempted, in my discourses on the power and grace of the Redeemer. The former, I shall now, by the divine assistance, apply myself to. And I have chosen the words now before us as a proper introduction to such a design.

They do indeed peculiarly refer to the coming of our Lord, which the Apostle represents as attested by that glory of which he was an eye-witness on the mount of transfiguration, and by that voice from

heaven which he heard there; but the truth of these facts is evidently connected with that of the gospel in general. I am persuaded therefore, you will think they are properly prefixed to a discourse on the general evidences of Christianity. And I hope, by the divine assistance, to propose them at this time in such a manner as shall convince you, that the Apostles had reason to say, and that we also have reason to repeat it, "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables."

I have often touched upon this subject; but I think it my duty at present to insist something more largely upon it. You easily apprehend, that it is a matter of the highest importance, being indeed no other than the great foundation of all our eternal hopes. While so many are daily attempting to destroy this foundation, it is possible, that those of you especially who are but entering on the world, may be called to give a reason of the hope that is in you. I would therefore, with the Apostle, be concerned, that you may be ready to do it. It may fortify you against the artifices by which the unwary are often deceived and insnared, and may possibly enable you to put to silence their foolishness. At least it will be for the satisfaction of your own minds, to have considered the matter seriously, and to be conscious to yourselves, that you are not Christians merely by education or example, as (had you been born elsewhere) you might have been Pagans or Mahometans; but that you are so upon rational evidence, and because, as the sacred historian expresses it, you know the certainty of those things in which you have been instructed.

To open and vindicate the proof of Christianity in all its extent, would be the employment of many discourses; nor would it on the whole, be proper to attempt it here. All that I now intend is, to give you a summary view of the most considerable arguments, in that which seems to me their most proper and natural connection, that so you may be able to judge of them better, than you could possibly do by a few scattered remarks, or by the most copious enlargement on any single branch of them alone. I shall endeavour to dispose these hints so, as that they may be some guide to those, whose leisure and abilities may lead them to a more ample and curious inquiry; that they may not be entangled in so complex an argument, but may proceed in an orderly manner. And if any of you, my friends, desire a more particular information on any of those heads, which I now but briefly suggest, you may depend upon it, that faithful ministers of every denomination will think it an important part of their duty, to give you all the private assistance they can. It is my hearty prayer that God would enable me to plead his cause with success; that he would open your understandings to receive these things, and strengthen your memories to retain them; "that you may not be like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but may be strong in faith, giving glory to God;" that your faith being more and more established, it may appear that the tree is watered at the roots; and all your other graces may grow and flourish in an equal proportion.

But before I proceed, I must desire you to observe, that there is no proof in the world so satisfactory to the true Christian, as to have felt the transforming power of the gospel on his own soul. As that illiterate man whose eyes were miraculously opened by Christ, when he was questioned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, who endeavoured with all their sophistry to prove Christ an impostor, answered, with great steadiness and constancy, and with a great deal of reason too, "This one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." So the most unlearned of the disciples of Jesus, having found his soul enlightened and sanctified, and felt his heart so effectually wrought upon, as to bring him home to his duty, his God, and his happiness, by the constraining power of the gospel, will despise a thousand subtle objections which may be urged against it: And though the cross of Christ may be to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, yet with this experience of its saving energy, he will honour it in the midst of all their contempt and ridicule, as "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." In this sense, though the miraculous communication of the Spirit be ceased, he that believes hath still the witness in himself; and while the Spirit beareth witness with his spirit that he is a child of God, he cannot doubt but that the word by which he was as it were begotten unto him, is indeed a divine and incorruptible seed. And perhaps there are certain seasons of pressing temptation, in which the most learned as well as the most illiterate Christian will find this the surest anchor of his hope.

Nevertheless it must be acknowledged, that this

glorious kind of evidence is like the white stone, mentioned in the Revelation, in which there was a new name written, which no man knew, but he who received it. God has therefore made other provision for the honour and support of his gospel, by furnishing it with a variety of proof, which may with undiminished, and indeed with growing conviction, be communicated from one to another. And we should be greatly wanting in gratitude to him, in zeal for a Redeemer's kingdom, and in charitable concern for the conversion of those who reject the gospel, as well as for the edification of those who embrace it, should we wholly overlook these arguments, or neglect to acquaint ourselves with them. This is the evidence which I am now to propose; and I desire you will hear it with a becoming attention. I speak to you as to rational creatures: Judge ye of the reasonableness of what I shall say.

In prosecution of this great design, I shall endeavour more particularly to show you, that if we take the matter on a general survey, it will appear highly probable that such a scheme of doctrines and precepts as we find Christianity to be, should indeed have been a divine revelation; and then, that if we examine into the external evidence of it, we shall find it certain in fact that it was so, and that it had its original from above.

First, Let me show, that taking the matter merely in theory, it will appear highly probable that such a system of the gospel should be indeed a divine revelation. To evince this, I would more particularly prove,—that the state of mankind was such as greatly to need a revelation;—that there seems, from the

light of nature, encouragement to hope that God should grant one;—that it is reasonable to believe, if any were made, it should be so introduced and transmitted as we are told Christianity was;—and that its general nature and substance should be such as we find that of the gospel is. If these particulars are made out, here will be a strong presumptive evidence that the gospel is from God; and we shall have opened a fair way toward that more direct proof which I principally intend.

1. The case of mankind is naturally such as greatly to need a divine revelation.—I speak not here of man in his original state; though even then, as many have largely shown, some instruction from above seemed necessary to inform him of many particulars, which it was highly expedient that he should immediately know; but I speak of him in the degenerate condition in which he now so evidently lies, by whatever means he was brought into it. It is an easy thing to make florid encomiums on the perfection of natural light, and to deceive unwary readers with an ambiguous term, (which shall sometimes signify all that appears even to the divine understanding, and sometimes no more than the meanest of the human race may, or than they actually do attain;) but let fact speak, and the controversy will soon be determined. I appeal to all that are acquainted with the records of antiquity, or that have any knowledge of the most credible accounts of the present state of those countries where Christianity is unknown, whether it is not too obvious a truth, that the whole heathen world has lain, and still lies in wickedness. Have not incomparably the greater

part of them been perpetually bewildered in their religious notions and practices, vastly differing from each other, and almost equally differing on all sides from the probable appearances of truth and reason? Is any thing so wild as not to have been believed, any thing so infamous as not to have been practised by them, while they have not only pretended to justify it by reason, but have consecrated it as a part of their religion? To this very day, what are the discoveries of new nations in the American or African world, but generally speaking, the opening of new scenes of enormity?—rapine, lust, cruelty, human sacrifices, and the most stupid idolatries, are, and for aught I can find, always have been, the morality and religion of almost all the Pagan nations under heaven: and to say, that there have still been some smothered sparks of reason within, which, if cherished, might have led them to truth and happiness, is only saying, that they have been so much the more criminal, and therefore so much the more miserable.

But you live at home, and hear these things only by uncertain report. Look then around you, within the sphere of your own observation, and see the temper and character of the generality of those who have been educated in a Christian, and even in a Protestant country. Observe their ignorance and forgetfulness of the divine Being, their impieties, their debaucheries, their fraud, their oppression, their pride, their avarice, their ambition, their unnatural insensibility of the wants and sorrows and interests of each other; and when you see how bad they generally are in the midst of so many advantages, judge by that of the probable state of those that

want them. Judge upon these views, whether a revelation be an unnecessary thing.

2. There is, from the light of nature, considerable encouragement to hope, that God would favour his creatures with so needful a blessing as a revelation appears. That a revelation is in itself a possible thing, is evident beyond all shadow of a doubt. Shall not He that made man's mouth, who has given us this wonderful faculty of discovering our sentiments, and communicating our ideas to each other,—shall not He be able to converse with his rational creatures, and by sensible manifestations, or by inward impressions, to convey the knowledge of things which lie beyond the ken of their natural faculties, and yet may be highly conducive to their advantage? To own a God, and to deny him such a power, would be a notorious contradiction.—But it may appear much more dubious, whether he will please to confer such a favour on sinful creatures.

Now I acknowledge, that we could not certainly conclude he would ever do it: considering on the one hand, how justly they stood exposed to his final displeasure; and on the other, what provision he had made by the frame of the human mind, and of nature around us, for giving us such notices of himself as would leave us inexcusable, if we either failed to know him, or to glorify him as God, as the apostle argues at large. Nevertheless methinks, we should have had something of this kind to hope, from considering God as the indulgent Father of his creatures; from observing the tender care which he takes of us, and the liberal supply which he grants for the support of the animal life; especially, from the provision

which he has made for man, considered as a guilty and calamitous creature, by the medicinal and healing virtues which he has given to many of the productions of nature, which in a state of perfect rectitude and happiness man would never have needed. This is a circumstance, which seemed strongly to intimate, that he would some time or another graciously provide some remedy to heal men's minds; and that he would interpose to instruct them, in his own nature, in the manner in which he is to be served, and in the final treatment which they may expect from him. And I think, such an apprehension seems very congruous to the sentiments of the generality of mankind; as appears from the many pretences to divine revelation which have often been made, and the readiness of multitudes to receive them on very slender proofs. This shows how naturally men expect some such kind interposition of the Deity: a thought which might farther be confirmed by some remarkable passages of heathen writers, which I have not now time particularly to mention.

3. We may easily conclude, that if a revelation were given, it would be introduced and transmitted in such a manner, as Christianity is said to have been.—It is exceedingly probable, for instance, that it should be taught, either by some illustrious person sent down from a superior world, or at least by a man of eminent wisdom and piety, who should himself have been, not only a teacher, but an example, of universal goodness. In order to this, it seems probable that he should be led through a series of calamity and distress; since otherwise he would not have been a pattern of the virtues which adorn ad-

versity, and are peculiar to it. And it might also have been expected, that in the extremity of his distress, the blessed God, whose messenger he was, should in some extraordinary manner, have interposed, either to preserve, or to recover him from death.

It is moreover exceedingly probable, that such a person, and perhaps also they who were at first employed as his messengers to the world, should be endowed with a power of working miracles; both to awaken men's attention, and to prove a divine mission, and the consequent truth of their doctrines; some of which might perhaps not be capable of any other kind of proof; or if they were, it is certain that no method of arguing is so short, so plain and so forcible, and on the whole, so well suited to the conviction, and probably the reformation of mankind, as a course of evident, repeated, and uncontrolled miracles. And such a method of proof is especially adapted to the populace, who are incomparably the greater part of mankind, and for whose benefit, we may assure ourselves, a revelation would chiefly be designed.—I might add, it was no way improbable, though not in itself certain, that a dispensation should open gradually on the world; and that the most illustrious messenger of God to men should be ushered in by some predictions, which should raise a great expectation of his appearance, and have an evident accomplishment in him.

As for the propagation of a religion so introduced, it seems no way improbable, that having been thus established in its first age, it should be transmitted to future generations by credible testimony, as other

important facts are. It is certain, that affairs of the utmost moment, which are transacted amongst men, depend on testimony: On this voyages are undertaken, settlements made, and controversies decided, on which not only the estates, but the lives of men depend. And though it must be owned, that such an historical evidence is not equally convincing with miracles which are wrought before our own eyes; yet it is certain, it may rise to such a degree as to exclude all reasonable doubt. And I know not why we should expect, that the evidence of a revelation should be such, as universally to compel the immediate assent of all to whom it is offered. To me it seems much more likely, that it should be so adjusted, as to be a kind of touchstone to the tempers and characters of men; capable indeed of giving ample satisfaction to the diligent and candid inquirer, yet attended with some circumstances, from whence the captious and perverse might take occasion to cavil and object. Such might we suppose the evidence of a revelation would be, and such it is maintained that of Christianity is. The teachers of it say, and undertake to prove, that it was thus introduced, thus established, and thus transmitted; and we trust, that this is a strong presumption in its favour: Especially as we can add,

4. That the main doctrines contained in the gospel, are of such a nature as we might in general suppose those of a divine revelation would be, rational, practical, and sublime.

One would imagine, that in a revelation of a religion from God, the great principles of natural religion should be clearly asserted, and strongly maintained;—such I mean, as the existence, the

unity, the perfection, and the providence of God; the essential and immutable difference between moral good and evil; the obligation we are under to the various branches of virtue, whether human, social, or divine—the value and immortality of the soul; and the rewards and punishments of a future state. One would easily conclude, that all these particulars must be contained in it; and that, upon the whole, it should appear calculated to form men's minds to a proper temper, rather than to amuse them with curious speculations.

It might indeed be farther supposed, and probably concluded, that such a revelation would contain some things, which could not have been learned from the highest improvements of natural light: and, considering the infinite and unfathomable nature of the blessed God, it would be more than probable, that many things might be hinted at, and referred to, which our feeble faculties should not be able fully to comprehend. Yet we should expect to find these introduced in a practical view, as directing us to duties before unknown, or suggesting powerful motives to make us resolute and constant in the discharge of the rest. Particularly on what terms, and to what degree, pardon and happiness might be expected by sinful creatures. As for ceremonial and positive institutions, we should imagine, at least in the most perfect state of the revelation, that they should be but few, and those few plainly subservient to the great purposes of practical religion.

I shall only add, that for as much as pride appears to be the most reigning corruption of the human mind, and the source of numberless irregularities;

it is exceedingly probable, that a divine revelation should be calculated to humble the fallen creature, and bring it to a sense of its guilt and weakness; and the more evidently that tendency appears, other things being equal, the greater reason there is to believe, that the original of such a scheme is from above.

Your own thoughts have undoubtedly prevented me in the application of these characters to the Christian Revelation. The justice of that application I must not now illustrate at large. But I must beg leave to advance one remark, which will conclude what I have to say on this general: Which is, that as the Christian system is undoubtedly worthy of God, so, considering the manner in which it is said to have been introduced, (separate from the evidence of these facts, which is afterwards to be considered,) it is extremely difficult to imagine from whom else it could have proceeded.

I will readily allow, that neither the reasonableness of its doctrines, nor the purity of its morals, will alone prove its divine original; since it is possible, the reason of one man may discover that, which the reason of another approves, as being, in itself considered, either true in theory, or useful in practice. But this is not all; for in the present case it is evident, that the first teachers of Christianity professed, that they were taught it by divine revelation, and that they were empowered by God with miraculous endowments for the confirmation of it. Now, if it were not indeed so as they professed, how can we account for so strange a phenomenon, as such a doctrine introduced with such pretences? If it were not from God, whence was it? from good, or from

evil angels, or men? Wicked creatures, as our Lord strongly intimates, would never contrive and propagate so excellent a scheme; nor can we imagine that holy angels, or righteous men, would thus be found false witnesses of God, or have attempted to support the cause of religion and truth, by such impious and notorious falsehoods, as their pretensions must have been, if they were falsehoods at all.

And thus much for the first branch of the argument: If you consider the Christian scheme only in theory, it appears highly probable; since a revelation was so much needed, might so reasonably be expected, and if it were even given, would, so far as we can judge, be thus introduced, and be in the main attended with such internal characters. And though we have not as yet expressly proved, that the gospel was introduced in such a manner, as the defenders of it assert; yet it would be strangely unaccountable, that so admirable a system of truth and duty should be advanced by the prince of darkness, and the children of wickedness; as it must have been, if the persons first employed in the propagation of it were not endowed with power from on high. To embrace the Gospel is so safe, and, on the whole, so comfortable a thing, that I think a wise man would deliberately and resolutely venture his all upon it, though nothing more could be offered for its confirmation. But, blessed be God! we have a great deal more to offer in this important cause; and can add, with still greater confidence, that it is not only in theory thus probable; but,

Secondly, That it is in fact certain, that Christianity is indeed a divine revelation.—Here, I confess,

the chief stress is to be laid; and therefore I shall insist more largely on this branch of the argument, and endeavour, by the divine assistance, to prove the certainty of this great fact. You will naturally apprehend, that I speak only of what is commonly called a moral certainty: which, though it amount not to strict *demonstration*, is such kind of *evidence* as suits past matters of fact, and is sufficient to make a candid and rational inquirer easy in his assent. But I need speak of no more; for, in many cases, such kind of evidence gives the mind as ample, and as rational a satisfaction, as it may find even in some supposed mathematical demonstration; since there it is possible, at least in a long deduction of particulars, for the most sagacious of mankind to fall into a mistake.

Now, in order to settle this grand point as clearly as I can, I think it may be proper to prove,

I. That the books of the New Testament, as they are now in your hands, may be depended upon as written by the first preachers and publishers of Christianity. And,

II. That from hence it will certainly follow, that what they assert is true, and that the religion they teach brings along with it such evidences of a divine authority, as may most justly recommend it to our acceptance.

Each of these heads might furnish out matter for many volumes; but it is my business to hint at the most obvious and important thoughts, by which they may be illustrated and confirmed.

I. I am to prove to you, that the books of the

New Testament, now in your hands, were written by the first preachers and publishers of Christianity.—I confine the present proof, to the books of the New Testament. Not that I think the authority of the Old to be suspected, or the use of it by any means to be despised. God forbid! It is an invaluable treasure, which demands our daily, delightful, and thankful perusal, and is capable of being defended in a manner in which I am persuaded its subtilest enemies will never be able to answer.

I now proceed to the argument, and shall advance in it by the following degrees. I shall prove,—that Christianity is an ancient religion;—that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, crucified at Jerusalem about eighteen hundred years ago;—that the first preachers of his religion wrote books, which went by the name of those that now make up the volume of our New Testament;—that they are preserved in the original to the present time;—and that the translation of them, which you have, is in the main such as may be depended upon as faithful. And then I shall have clearly made out what I proposed in this first part.

1. It is certain, that Christianity is not a new religion, but that it was maintained by great multitudes, quickly after the time in which Jesus is said to have appeared.

That there was, considerably more than sixteen hundred years ago, a body of men who went by the name of Christians, is as evident, as that a race of men was then existing in the world; nor do I know that any have been wild and confident enough to dispute it. If any should, for argument sake, ques-

tion it, they might quickly be convinced, by a considerable number of Christian writers, who lived in the same, or the next age, and mention it as a thing notoriously certain, that Christianity was then of some standing in the world; some of them giving directions and exhortations to their brethren, and others forming apologies to their enemies, for which there could not otherwise have been the least foundation. We might have acquiesced in their testimony had it been alone; but it is confirmed by that of Jews and Heathens, who, by their early invectives against the Christians, do most evidently prove, that there was such a body of men in the world. The most considerable Roman historians, who lived in this age, and wrote of it, are Tacitus and Suetonius, who published their writings above sixteen hundred years ago; and they are always, and very justly, appealed to, as pregnant witnesses upon this occasion. For Tacitus assures us, "that in Nero's days," who begun his reign about twenty years after the death of Christ, "there was a vast multitude of Christians, not only in Judea, but at Rome too; against whom Nero raised a persecution, attended with such circumstances of ignominy and cruelty, as moved the compassion even of their enemies; of which number this historian evidently was. Nay, he plainly intimates, that this was not the first attempt which had been made to crush them; though this attempt was so early as we have heard.

His contemporary, Suetonius, in his more concise manner, attests the same. And Pliny, the intimate friend and correspondent of both, being employed in Trajan's time to persecute the Christians, writes an

account of them to that Emperor, which, though commonly known, must be mentioned, as it is so highly important. After having spoken very favourably of their moral character, he adds, "That many of both sexes, and of every age and rank, were infected with this superstition;" as he thinks fit to express it: "that it was got into the villages, as well as the cities; and that, till he begun to put the laws in execution against them, the temples of the heathen deities were almost deserted, and hardly any could be found, who would buy victims for them. It might be added, that Marcus Antoninus, who wrote a few years after Pliny, mentions the Christians as examples of a resolute and obstinate contempt of death. "And it is generally supposed, that they are the Galileans, whom Epictetus speaks of, as those whom practice had taught to despise the rage of their armed enemies."

I shall dismiss this head with observing, that it tends greatly to the confirmation of Christianity, that each of these celebrated and ancient Pagan writers, at the same time that they attest the existence of such a body of men professing it, inform us of those extreme persecutions which they underwent, in the very infancy of their religion. A fact also farther apparent, from the apologies addressed by the Christians to their persecutors, which, whatever imperfections may attend the manner in which some of them are written, appear to me some of the most valuable remains of antiquity, (the sacred records only excepted,) especially those of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Minutius Felix. This fundamental point is, then, abundantly made out, that there were

vast numbers of men, very quickly after the time when Jesus is said to have appeared upon earth, who professed his religion, and chose to endure the greatest extremities, rather than they would abandon it. From hence it will be easy to show,

2. That there was certainly such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified at Jerusalem, when Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor there.

It can never be imagined, that multitudes of people should take their name from Christ, and sacrifice their lives for their adherence to him, even in the same age in which he is said to have lived, if they had not been well assured there was such a person. Now, several of the authors I have mentioned, plainly assert, that the Christians were denominated from Christ; nay, Tacitus expressly adds, "that he was put to death under Pontius Pilate, who was procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius." And it is well known, that the primitive Christian apologists often appeal to the acts of Pilate, or the memoirs of his government, (which he, according to the custom of other procurators, transmitted to Rome,) as containing an account of these transactions; and as the appeal was made to those who had the command of the public records, we may assure ourselves such testimonies were then extant. But it is a fact, which our enemies never denied; they owned it, they even gloried in it, and upbraided the Christians with it. The Jews, therefore, in some of their earliest writings since those times, call Jesus by the ignominious name of "the man that was hanged or crucified," and his followers, "the servants of the crucified person." And

Lucian rallies them for deserting the pompous train of the heathen deities, to worship one whom he impiously calls, "a crucified impostor." Spartian, also, assures us, that the Emperor Alexander Severus entertained such high thoughts of Christ, "that he would have admitted him into the number of his deities, and have built a temple to him, had not his Pagan subjects vigorously opposed it." And Porphyry, though an inveterate enemy to Christianity, not only allowed there was such a person, but honoured him "as a most wise and pious man, approved by the gods, and taken up into heaven for his distinguished virtues."—I might add a great deal more on this head; but it already appears as certain as ancient history can make it, and incomparably more certain than most of the facts which it has transmitted to us, that there was at the time commonly supposed, such a person as Christ, who professed himself a divine teacher, and who gathered many disciples, by whom his religion was afterwards published in the world.

3. It is also certain, that the first publishers of this religion wrote books, which contained an account of the life and doctrine of Jesus their Master, and which went by the name of those that now make up our New Testament.

The greatest adversaries of Christianity must grant, that we have books of great antiquity, written, some fourteen, others fifteen, and some sixteen hundred years ago; in which mention is made of the life of Christ, as written by many, and especially by four of his disciples, who, by way of eminence, are called Evangelists. Great pains, indeed, have been

taken to prove, that some spurious pieces were published under the names of the apostles, containing the history of these things: but surely this must imply, that it was a thing known and allowed, that the apostles did write some narrations of this kind; as counterfeit coin implies some true money, which it is designed to represent.—And I am sure, he must be very little acquainted with the ancient Ecclesiastical writers, who does not know, that the primitive Christians made a very great difference between those writings, which we call the canonical books of the New Testament, and others: which plainly shows, that they did not judge of writings merely by the names of their pretended authors, but inquired with an accuracy becoming the importance of those pretences. The result of this inquiry was, that the Four Gospels, the Acts, Thirteen Epistles of Paul, One of Peter, and One of John, were received upon such evidence, that Eusebius, a most accurate and early critic in these things, could not learn that they had ever been disputed. And afterwards, the remaining books of the New Testament, Hebrews, James, the Second of Peter, the Second and Third of John, Jude, and the Revelation, were admitted as genuine, and added to the rest; though some circumstances attending them, rendered their authority for a while a little dubious. On the whole, it is plain, the primitive Christians were so satisfied in the authority of these sacred books, that they speak of them, not only as credible and authentic, but as equal to the oracles of the Old Testament, as divinely inspired, as the words of the Spirit, as the law and organ of God, and as the rule of

faith, which cannot be contradicted without great guilt; with many other expressions of the like kind, which often occur in their discourses. To which I may add, that in some of their councils, the New Testament was placed on a throne, to signify their concern, that all their controversies and actions might be determined and regulated by it.

On the whole, then, you see, that the primitive church did receive certain pieces, which bore the same titles with the books of our New Testament. Now, I think it is evident they were as capable of judging, whether a book was written by Matthew, John, or Paul, as an ancient Roman could be of determining whether Horace, Tully, or Livy, wrote those which go under their names. And I am sure, the interest of the former was so much more concerned in the writings of the apostles, than that of the latter in the compositions of the poets, orators, or even their historians; that there is reason to believe they would take much greater care to inform themselves fully in the merits of the cause, and to avoid being imposed upon by artifice and fiction. Let me now show,

4. That the books of the New Testament have been preserved in the main, uncorrupted, to the present time, in the original language in which they were written.

This is a matter of vast importance, and, blessed be God! it is attended with proportionable evidence; an evidence in which the hand of Providence has indeed been remarkably seen; for I am confident, that there is no other ancient book in the world, which may so certainly, and so easily, be proved to be authentic.

And here I will not argue merely from the piety of the primitive Christians, and the heroic resolution with which they chose to endure the greatest extremities, rather than they would deliver up their Bibles, (though that be a consideration of some evident weight;) but shall entreat you to consider the utter impossibility of corrupting them. From the first ages they were received and read in the churches, as a part of their public worship, just as Moses and the prophets were in the Jewish synagogues; they were presently spread far and wide, as the boundaries of the church were increased; they were early translated into other languages, of which translations some remain to this day. Now, when this was the case, how could they possibly be adulterated? Is it a thing to be supposed, or imagined, that thousands and millions of people should have come together from distant countries; and, that with all their diversities of language, and customs, and, I may add, of sentiments too, they should have agreed on corrupting a book, which they all acknowledged to be the rule of their faith, and their manners, and the great charter by which they held their eternal hopes? It were madness to believe it; especially when we consider what numbers of heretics appeared in the very infancy of the church, who all pretended to build their notions on Scripture, and most of them appealed to it as the final judge of controversies; now it is certain, that these different parties of professing Christians were a perpetual guard upon each other, and rendered it impossible for one party to practise grossly on the sacred books, without the discovery and the clamour of the rest.

Nor must I omit to remind you, that in every age, from the apostles' time to our own, there have been numberless quotations made from the books of the New Testament; and a multitude of commentaries in various languages, and some of very ancient date, have been written upon them: so that if the books themselves were lost, I believe they might in a great measure, if not entirely, be recovered from the writings of others. And one might venture to say, that if all the quotations, which have ever been made from all the ancient writings now remaining in Europe, were to be amassed together, the bulk of them would be by no means comparable to that of the quotations taken from the New Testament alone. So that a man might, with a much better face, dispute whether the writings ascribed to Homer, Demosthenes, Virgil, or Cesar, be in the main such as they left them, than he could question it concerning those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, James, and Paul, whether they are in the main so.

I say, in the main, because we readily allow, that the hand of a printer, or of a transcriber, might chance, in some places, to insert one letter or word for another, and the various readings of this, as well as of all other ancient books, prove, that this has sometimes been the case. Nevertheless, those various readings are generally of so little importance, that he who can urge them as an objection against the assertion we are now maintaining, must have little judgment, or little integrity; and indeed, after those excellent things which have been said on the subject by many defenders of Christianity, if he have read their writings, he must have little modesty too.

Since, then, it appears, that the books of the New Testament, as they now stand in the original, are, without any material alteration, such as they were, when they came from the hands of the persons whose names they bear, nothing remains to complete this part of the argument, but to show,

5. That the translation of them, now in your hands, may be depended upon, as, in all things most material, agreeable to the original. This is a fact of which the generality of you are not capable of judging immediately, yet it is a matter of great importance. It is, therefore, a very great pleasure to me to think, what ample evidence you may find another way, to make your minds as easy on this head as you could reasonably wish them. I mean, by the concurrent testimony of others, in circumstances in which you cannot imagine they would unite to deceive you.

There are very few of us whose office it is publicly to preach the gospel, who have not examined this matter with care, and who are not capable of judging in so easy a case. You know, indeed, that we do not scruple, on some occasions, to animadvert upon certain passages; but these remarks affect not the fundamentals of religion, and seldom reach any farther than the beauty of a figure, or, at most, the connection of an argument. Nay, I can confidently say, that, to the best of my knowledge and remembrance, as there is no copy of the Greek, so neither is there any translation of the New Testament, which I have seen, whether ancient or modern, how defective or faulty soever, from which all the principal facts and doctrines of Christianity might not

be learned, so far as the knowledge of them is necessary to salvation, or even to some considerable degrees of edification in piety.

But I desire not, that with respect to our own translation of the New Testament, a matter of so great moment as the fidelity of it should rest on my testimony alone, or entirely on that of any of my brethren, for whose integrity and learning you may have the greatest and justest esteem. I rejoice to say, that this is a head on which we cannot possibly deceive you, if we were ever so desirous to do it. And indeed, in this respect, that is our advantage, which in others is our great calamity; I mean, the diversity of our religious opinions. It is certain, that wheresoever there is a body of dissenters from the public establishment, who do yet agree with their brethren of that establishment in the use of the same translation, though they are capable of examining it, and judging of it, there is as great evidence as could reasonably be desired, that such a translation is in the main right; for if it were in any considerable article corrupted, most of the other debates would quickly lose themselves in this; and though such dissenters had all that candour, tenderness, and respect for their fellow Christians which I hope we shall always endeavour to maintain, yet they would, no doubt, think themselves obliged in conscience to bear a warm and loud testimony against so crying an abomination, as they would another day appear free from the guilt of a confederacy to poison the public fountains, and destroy the souls of men. But we make no complaint on this subject; we all unite in bearing our testimony to the oracles of God, as

delivered in our own language. Oh that we were equally united in regulating our doctrine and our discipline, our worship, and our practice by them!

You see then, on the whole, how much reason there is to believe, that the books of the New Testament, as they are now in your hands, were written by those whose names they bear, even the first preachers and publishers of Christianity. This is the grand point; and from hence it will follow, by a train of easy and natural consequences, that the Gospel is most certainly true: but that is a topic of argument, abundantly sufficient to furnish out matter for another discourse. May God command his blessing on what has been already laid before us, that, through the operation of his Spirit, it may be useful for establishing our regard to the Scripture, and for confirming our faith in that Almighty Redeemer, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last; whom to know is life everlasting, and in whom to believe is the great security of our eternal salvation! Amen.

DISCOURSE II.

THE EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY DEDUCED FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT ALLOWED TO BE GENUINE.

When we are addressing ourselves to an audience of professing Christians, I think we may reasonably take it for granted, in the main course of our ministry, that they believe the truth of the Gospel, and

may argue with them on that supposition. To be ever laying the foundation would be the part of an unwise builder, and be greatly detrimental to your edification and comfort, and, I may add, to our own. Nevertheless, Christians, we do not desire that you should take it merely upon our word, that your religion is divine, and your Scriptures inspired. We desire that your faith, as well as your worship, should be a reasonable service; and wish that, in this respect, all the Lord's people were as prophets; that as every Christian is in his sphere set for the defence of the Gospel, each might, in some measure, be able to assert its truth, and, if possible, to convince gainsayers. Therefore, as we are often hinting at the chief arguments, on which this sacred cause is established, (established so firmly, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it;) so I thought it might be agreeable and useful, on this occasion, to state them a little more largely, in their proper connection, and mutual dependence. And I chose the rather to do it, as these discourses are especially intended for young people, who, in an age in which infidelity so much abounds, can hardly expect to pass through the world, if they are called to converse much in it, without some attacks on their faith; which may be very dangerous, if they are not provided with some armour of proof against them. It is indeed, (as I before observed,) above all things to be desired, that the heart may be established with grace; for we are then most secure from the danger of forgetting God's precepts, when they are the blessed means of quickening us to a divine life. Yet as other arguments have their use, and in some de-

gree their necessity too, I shall go on briefly to propose them.

I am now showing you, that Christianity, which before appeared in theory probable and rational, has in fact a convincing evidence; not only that it may be, but that it certainly is true;—as it is certain, that the New Testament, as now in your hands, is genuine;—and as it may with great evidence be argued from thence, that the Gospel is a revelation from God. The first of these points I have endeavoured to prove at large; and I now proceed to show,

2. That from allowing the New Testament to be genuine, it will certainly follow, that Christianity is a divine revelation. And here a man is at first ready to be lost in the multiplicity of arguments which surround him. It is very easy to find proofs; but difficult to range and dispose them in such an order, as best to illustrate and confirm each other. Now I choose to offer them in the following series, which seems to me the most natural, and perhaps may be most intelligible to you.

The authors of the books contained in the New Testament were certainly capable of judging concerning the truth of the facts they attested;—their character, so far as we can judge of it by their writings, renders them worthy of regard;—and they were under no temptation to attempt to impose on the world by such a story as they have given us, if it had been false; so that, considering all things, there is no reason to believe they would attempt it;—but if they had, they must probably have perished in the attempt, and could never have gained credit

in the world, had their testimony been false.—Nevertheless it is certain in fact, that they did gain credit, and succeed in a most amazing manner against all opposition. It is certain, therefore, that the facts they assert were true; and if they were true, then it was reasonable for their contemporaries, and is reasonable for us, to receive the Gospel as a divine revelation; especially, if we consider what has happened in the world for the confirmation of it, since it was first propagated by them. This is the conclusion to which I was to lead you; and I beg you would seriously consider each of the steps by which we arrive at it.

1. It is exceedingly evident, that the writers of the New Testament certainly knew, whether the facts they asserted were true or false. And this they must have known, for this plain reason; because they tell us, they did not trust merely to the report, even of persons whom they thought most credible; but were present themselves, when several of the most important facts happened, and so received them on the testimony of their own senses. On this, St. John in his Epistle lays a very great and reasonable stress: That which we have seen with our eyes, and that not only by a sudden glance, but which we have attentively looked upon, and which even our hands have handled of the word of life, that is, of Christ and his Gospel,—declare we unto you.

Let the common sense of mankind judge here. Did not Matthew and John certainly know, whether they had personally and familiarly conversed with Jesus of Nazareth, or not? whether he had chosen them for his constant attendants and apostles?

whether they had seen him heal the sick, dispossess devils, and raise the dead? and whether they themselves had received from him such miraculous endowments as they say he bestowed upon them? Did not they know whether he fell into the hands of his enemies, and was publicly put to death or not? Did not John know whether he saw him expiring on the cross, or not; and whether he received from him the dying charge which he records? Did he not know whether he saw him wounded in the side with a spear, or not? and whether he did, or did not, see that effusion of blood and water, which was an infallible argument of his being really dead? Concerning which, it being so material a circumstance, he adds, "He that saw it bears record, and he knoweth that he saith true:" that is, that it was a case in which he could not possibly be deceived. And with regard to Christ's resurrection, did he not certainly know whether he saw our Lord again and again; and whether he handled his body, that he might be sure it was not a mere phantom? What one circumstance of his life could he certainly know, if he were mistaken in this? Did not Luke know whether he was in the ship with Paul, when that extraordinary wreck happened by which they were thrown ashore on the island of Malta? Did he not know whether, while they were lodged together in the Governor's house, Paul miraculously healed one of the family, and many other diseased persons in the island, as he positively asserts that he did?

Did not Paul certainly know whether Christ appeared to him in the way to Damascus, or not? Whether he was blind, and afterwards, on the prayer

of a fellow-disciple, received his sight? Or was that a circumstance in which there could be room for mistake? Did he not know whether he received such extraordinary revelations, and extraordinary powers, as to be able, by the imposition of his hands, or by the words of his mouth, to work miracles, and even to convey supernatural endowments to others? To add no more, did not Peter know whether he saw the glory of Christ's transfiguration, and heard that voice to which he so expressly refers, when he says in the text, "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables;—but were eye-witnesses of his majesty,—when there came such a voice to him; and this voice we heard."

Now Matthew, John, Luke, Paul, and Peter, are by far the most considerable writers of the New Testament; and I am sure, when you reflect on these particulars, you must own, that there are few historians, ancient or modern, that could so certainly judge of the truth of the facts they have related. You may perhaps think I have enlarged too much in stating so clear a case, but you will please to remember, it is the foundation of the whole argument; and that this branch of it alone cuts off infidels from that refuge, which I believe they would generally choose, that of pleading the apostles were enthusiasts; and leaves them silent, unless they will say they were impostors: for you evidently see, that, could we suppose these facts to be false, they could by no means pretend an involuntary mistake, but must, in the most criminal and aggravated sense, as Paul himself expresses it, be found false witnesses of God. But how unreasonable it would be to

charge them with so notorious a crime, will in part appear, if we consider,

2. That the character of these writers, so far as we can judge by their works, seems to render them worthy of regard, and leaves no room to imagine they intended to deceive us.—I shall not stay to show at large, that they appear to have been persons of natural sense, and at the time of their writing, of a composed mind; for I verily believe, no man that ever read the New Testament with attention, could believe they were idiots or madmen. Let the discourses of Christ in the Evangelists, of Peter and Paul in the Acts, as well as many passages in the Epistles, be perused, and I will venture to say, he who is not even charmed with them, must be a stranger to all the justest rules of polite criticism: but he who suspects that the writers wanted common sense, must himself be most evidently destitute of it; and he who can suspect they might possibly be distracted, must himself, in this instance at least, be just as mad as he imagines them to have been.

It was necessary, however, just to touch upon this; because unless we are satisfied, that a person be himself in what he writes, we cannot pretend to determine his character from his writings. Having premised this, I must entreat you, as you peruse the New Testament, to observe what evident marks it bears of simplicity and integrity, of piety and benevolence, which when you have observed, you will find them pleading the cause of its authors, with a resistless, though a gentle eloquence; and powerfully persuading the mind, that men who were capable of writing so excellently well, are not, without the

strongest evidence, to be suspected of acting so detestably ill, as we must suppose they did, if in this solemn manner, they were carrying on an imposture, in such circumstances as attended the case before us. For,

(1.) The manner in which they tell their amazing story, is most happily adapted to gain our belief. For as they tell it with a great detail of circumstances, which would by no means be prudent in legendary writers, because it leaves so much the more room for confutation; so they also do it in the most easy and natural manner. There is no air of declamation and harangue; nothing that looks like artifice and design; no apologies, no encomiums, no characters, no reflections, no digressions. But the facts are recounted with great simplicity, just as they seem to have happened; and those facts are left to speak for themselves, and their great Author. It is plain, that the rest of these writers, as well as the Apostle Paul, did not affect excellency of speech, or flights of eloquence, (as the phrase signifies) but determined to know nothing, though amongst the most learned and polite, save Jesus Christ, even him that was crucified. A conduct, that is the more to be admired, when we consider how extraordinary a theme theirs was, and with what abundant variety of most pathetic declamation it would easily have furnished any common writer; so that one would really wonder how they could forbear it. But they rightly judged, that a vain affectation of ornament, when recording such a story as of their own knowledge, might perhaps have brought their sincerity into question, and so have rendered the cross of Christ of none effect.

(2.) Their integrity does likewise evidently appear in the freedom with which they mention those circumstances, which might have exposed their Master and themselves to the greatest contempt, amongst prejudiced and inconsiderate men, such as they know they must generally expect to meet with.—As to their Master, they scruple not to own, that his country was infamous, his birth and education mean, and his life indigent; that he was disdainfully rejected by the rulers, and accused of sabbath-breaking, blasphemy, and sedition; that he was reviled by the populace as a lunatic, and a demoniac; and at last, by the united rage of both rulers and people, was publicly executed as the vilest of malefactors, with all imaginable circumstances of ignominy, scorn, and abhorrence.—Nor do they scruple to own that terror and distress of spirit into which he was thrown by his sufferings, though this was a circumstance at which some of the heathens took the greatest offence, as utterly unworthy so excellent and divine a person. —As to themselves, the Apostles readily confess, not only the meanness of their original employments, and the scandals of their former life, but their prejudices, their follies, and their faults, after Christ had honoured them with so holy a calling. They acknowledge slowness of apprehension under so excellent a teacher; their unbelief, their cowardice, their ambition, their rash zeal, and their foolish contentions. So that, on the whole, they seem every where to forget that they are writing of themselves, and appear not at all solicitous about their own reputation, but only that they might represent the matter just as it was, whether they went through

honour or dishonour, through evil report or good report. Nor is this all; for,

3. It is certain that there are in their writings the most genuine traces, not only of a plain and honest, but of a most pious and devout, a most benevolent and generous disposition. These appear especially in the epistolary parts of the New Testament, where indeed we should most reasonably expect to find them: and of these I may confidently affirm, that the greater progress any one has made in love to God, in zeal for his glory, in a compassionate and generous concern for the present and future happiness of mankind; the more humble, and candid, and temperate, and pure he is; the more ardently he loves truth, and the more steadily he is determined to suffer the greatest extremity in its defence; in a word, the more his heart is weaned from the present world, and the more it is fired with the prospects of a glorious immortality; the more pleasure will he take in reading those writings, the more will he relish the spirit which discovers itself in them, and find, that as face answers face in water, so does the traces piety and goodness which appear there, answer to those which a good man feels in his own soul. Nay, I will add, that the warm and genuine workings of that excellent and holy temper, which every where discovers itself in the New Testament, have for many ages been the most effectual means of spreading a spirit of virtue and piety in the world; and what of it is to be found in these degenerate days, seems principally owing to these incomparable and truly divine writings.

Where then there are such genuine marks of an

excellent character, not only in laboured discourses, but in epistolary writings, and those sometimes addressed to particular and intimate friends, to whom the mind naturally opens itself with the greatest freedom, surely no candid and equitable judge would lightly believe them to be all counterfeit; or would imagine, without strong proof, that persons who breathe such exalted sentiments of virtue and piety, should be guilty of any notorious wickedness. And in proportion to the degree of enormity and aggravation attending such a supposed crime, it may justly be expected, that the evidence of their having really committed it, should be unanswerably strong and convincing.

Now, it is most certain, on the principles laid down above, that if the testimony of the apostles was false, they must have acted as detestable and villanous a part as one can easily conceive. To be found (as the Apostle with his usual energy expresses it,) "false witnesses of God," in any single instance, and solemnly to declare him miraculously to have done what we know in our own consciences was never done at all, would be an audacious degree of impiety, to which none but the most abandoned of mankind could arrive. Yet, if the testimony of the apostles was false, as we have proved they could not be themselves mistaken in it, this must have been their conduct, and that, not in one single instance only, but in a thousand. Their life must, in effect, be one continued and perpetual scene of perjury; and all the most solemn actions of it, (in which they were speaking to God, or speaking of him as the God and Father of Christ, from whom they received their

mission and powers,) must be a most profane and daring insult on all the acknowledged perfections of his nature.

And the inhumanity of such a conduct would, on the whole, have been equal to its impiety; for it was deceiving men in their most important interests, and persuading them to venture their whole future happiness on the power and fidelity of one, whom, on this supposition, they knew to have been an impostor, and justly to have suffered a capital punishment for his crimes.

It would have been great guilt to have given the hearts and devotions of men so wrong a turn, even though they had found magistrates ready to espouse and establish, yea, and to enforce the religion they taught. But to labour to propagate it in the midst of the most vigorous and severe opposition from them, must equally enhance the guilt and folly of the undertaking: for by this means they made themselves accessary to the ruin of thousands; and all the calamities which fell on such proselytes, or even on their remotest descendants, for the sake of Christianity, would be in a great measure chargeable on these first preachers of it. The blood of honest, yea, and (supposing them, as you must, to have been involuntarily deceived) of pious, worthy, and heroic persons, who might otherwise have been the greatest blessings to the public, would in effect be crying for vengeance against them: and the distresses of the widows and orphans, which those martyrs might leave behind them, would join to swell the account.

So that, on the whole, the guilt of those malefactors, who are from time to time the victims of public

justice, even for robbery, murder, or treason, is small when compared with that which we have now been supposing. And corrupt as human nature is, it appears to me utterly improbable, that twelve men should be found, I will not say in one little nation, but even on the whole face of the earth, who could be capable of entering into so black a confederacy, on any terms whatsoever.

And now, in this view of the case, make a serious pause, and compare with it what we have just been saying of the character of the apostles of Jesus, so far as an indifferent person could conjecture it from their writings; and then say, whether you can in your hearts believe them to have been these abandoned wretches, at once the reproach and astonishment of mankind? You cannot surely believe such things of any, and much less of them, unless it shall appear they were in some peculiar circumstances of strong temptation; and what those circumstances could be, it is difficult even for imagination to conceive. But history is so far from suggesting any unthought-of fact to help our imagination on this head, that it bears strongly the contrary way; and hardly any part of my work is easier than to show,

3. That they were under no temptation to forge a story of this kind, or to publish it to the world, knowing it to be false.—They could reasonably expect no gain, no reputation by it. But, on the contrary, supposing it an imposture, they must, with the most ordinary share of prudence, have foreseen infamy and ruin, as the certain consequences of attempting it. For the grand foundation of their scheme was, that Jesus of Nazareth, who was cruci-

fied at Jerusalem by the Jewish rulers, was the Son of God, and the Lord of all things. I appeal to your consciences, whether this looks at all like the contrivance of artful and designing men. It was evidently charging upon the princes of the country the most criminal and aggravated murder; indeed, all things considered, the most enormous act of wickedness which the sun had ever seen. They might therefore depend upon it, that these rulers would immediately employ all their art and power to confute their testimony, and to destroy their persons. Accordingly one of them was presently stoned, and another quickly after beheaded;—and most of the rest were scattered abroad into strange cities, where they would be sure to be received with great prejudices raised against them amongst the Jews by reports from Jerusalem, and vastly strengthened by their expectations of a temporal Messiah; expectations which, as the apostles knew by their own experience, it was exceeding difficult to root out of men's minds; expectations which would render the doctrine of Christ crucified an insuperable stumbling-block to the Jews.

Nor could they expect a much better reception amongst the Gentiles; with whom their business was to persuade them to renounce the gods of their ancestors, and to depend on a person who had died the death of a malefactor and a slave; to persuade them to forego the pompous idolatries in which they had been educated, and all the sensual indulgences with which their religion, (if it might be called a religion) was attended, to worship one invisible God through one Mediator, in the most plain and simple

manner; and to receive a set of precepts, most directly calculated to control and restrain, not only the enormities of men's actions, but the irregularities of their hearts. A most difficult undertaking! And to engage them to this, they had no other arguments to bring, but such as were taken from the views of an invisible state of happiness or misery, of which they asserted their crucified Jesus to be the supreme disposer; who should another day dispense his blessings, or his vengeance, as the Gospel had been embraced, or rejected. Now, could it be imagined, that men would easily be persuaded, merely on the credit of their affirmation, or in compliance with their importunity, to believe things which to their prejudiced minds would appear so improbable, and to submit to impositions, to their corrupt inclinations so insupportable? And if they could not persuade them to it, what could the apostles then expect? What, but to be insulted as fools or madmen, by one sort of people; and by another, to be persecuted with the most savage and outrageous cruelty, as blasphemers of the gods, as seducers of the people, and as disturbers of the public peace? All which we know accordingly happened. Nay, they assure us, that their Lord had often warned them of it; and that they themselves expected it, and thought it necessary to admonish their followers to expect it too; and it appears, that far from drawing back upon that account, as they would surely have done if they had been governed by secular motives, they became so much the more zealous and courageous, and encouraged each other to resist even to blood. Now, as this is a great evidence of the integrity and piety

of their character, and thus illustrates the former head; so it serves to the purpose now immediately in view; that is, it proves how improbable it is, that any person of common sense should engage in an imposture, from which (as many have justly observed) they could, on their own principles, have nothing to expect, but ruin in this world, and damnation in the next. When, therefore, we consider and compare their character and their circumstances, it appears utterly improbable, on various accounts, that they would have attempted in this article to impose upon the world. But suppose that, in consequence of some unaccountable as well as undiscoverable frenzy, they had ventured on the attempt, it is easy to show,

4. That, humanly speaking, they must quickly have perished in it, and their foolish cause must have died with them, without ever gaining any credit in the world.

One may venture to say this in general, on the principles which I before laid down; but it appears still more evident, when we consider the nature of the fact they asserted, in conjunction with the methods they took to engage men to believe it; methods which, had the apostles been impostors, must have had the most direct tendency to ruin both their scheme and themselves.

1. Let us a little more particularly reflect on the nature of that grand fact, the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ; which, as I observed, was the great foundation of the Christian scheme, as first exhibited by the apostles.—The resurrection of a dead man, and his ascension into, and abode in, the upper world, was so strange a thing, that a

thousand objections would immediately be raised against it; and some extraordinary proof would justly be required as a balance to them. Now, I wish the rejecters of the Gospel would set themselves to invent some hypothesis, which should have any appearance of probability, to show how such an amazing story should ever gain credit in the world, if it had not some very convincing proof. Where, and when, could it first begin to be received? Was it in the same, or a succeeding age? Was it at Jerusalem, the spot of ground on which it is said to have happened, or in Greece, or Italy, or Asia, or Africa? You may change the scene, and the time, as you please, but you cannot change the difficulty.

Take it in a parallel instance. Suppose twelve men in London were now to affirm, that a person executed there as a malefactor in a public manner, a month or six weeks ago, or if you please, a year, or five, or ten years since, (for it is much the same,) was a prophet sent from God with extraordinary powers, that he was raised from the dead, that they conversed with him after his revival, and at last saw him taken up into heaven; would their united testimony make them be believed there? Or suppose them, if you please, to disperse, and that one or two of them should come hither, and go on to more distant places, suppose Leicester, Nottingham, or York, and tell their story there; and that others were to carry it over to Paris, or Amsterdam, or to Vienna, or Madrid: could they expect any more credit with us, or with them; or hope for any thing better, than to be looked upon as lunatics and treated as such?— And if they should go into other places, and attempt

to mend their scheme, by saying their Master was put to death one hundred or two hundred years ago, when there could be no historical evidence of it discovered, and no proof given but their own confident assertion, would they remove, or would they not rather increase, the difficulty? Or would they, in any of these cases, gain credit by the most dexterous tricks of legerdemain, of which you can suppose them masters? Especially if they should undertake, in consequence of such supposed facts, to engage men to renounce the religion in which they had been educated; to deny themselves in their dearest pas sions and most important worldly interests; and even probably to hazard their liberties and their lives in dependence on a future reward, to be received in a place and state, which no man living on earth had ever seen or known? You would readily allow this to be an insupposable case; and why should you suppose it to have happened sixteen or seventeen hundred years ago? You may assure yourselves, that the reason, and the passions of mankind were then as strong as they are now. But let us a little more particularly consider,

2. The manner in which the apostles undertook to prove the truth of their testimony to this fact; and it will evidently appear, that instead of confirming their scheme, it must have been sufficient utterly to have overthrown it, had it been itself the most probable imposture that the wit of man could ever have contrived. You know, they did not merely assert, that they had seen miracles wrought by this Jesus, but that he had endowed themselves with a variety of miraculous powers. And these they un-

dertook to display, not in such idle and useless tricks as slight of hand might perform, but in such solid and important works, as appeared worthy a divine interposition, and entirely superior to human power; restoring, as they pretend, sight to the blind, soundness to lepers, activity to the lame, and, in some instances, life to the dead. Nor were these things undertaken in a corner, in a circle of friends or dependants, nor were they said to be wrought on such as might be suspected of being confederates in the fraud; but they were done often in the public streets, in the sight of enemies, on the persons of such as were utter strangers to the apostles, but sometimes well known to neighbours and spectators, as having long laboured under these calamities, to human skill utterly incurable. Would impostors have made such pretensions as these? Or if they had, must they not immediately have been exposed and ruined?

Nor is there any room at all to object, that perhaps the apostles might not undertake to do these things on the spot, but only assert they had done them elsewhere: for even then, it would have been impossible they should have gained credit; and they would have seemed the less credible on account of such a pretence. Whatever appearances there might have been of gravity, integrity, and piety, in the conversation of Peter, (for instance,) very few, especially few that had known but little of him, would have taken it upon his word, that he saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead at Bethany; but fewer yet would have believed it upon his affirmation, had it been ever so solemn, that he had himself

raised Dorcas at Joppa; unless he had done some extraordinary work before them, correspondent, at least, if not equal to that. You will easily think of invincible objections, which otherwise might have been made; and undoubtedly, the more such assertions have been multiplied, every new person, and scene, and fact, had been an additional advantage given to the enemy, to have detected and confuted the whole scheme, which Peter and his associates had thus endeavoured to establish.

But to come still closer to the point.—If the New Testament be genuine, (as I have already proved it) then it is certain, that the apostles pretend to have wrought miracles in the very presence of those to whom their writings were addressed; nay more, they profess likewise to have conferred those miraculous gifts, in some considerable degrees, on others, even on the very persons to whom they write, and they appeal to their consciences as to the truth of it. And could there possibly be room for delusion here? It is exceedingly remarkable to this purpose, that Paul makes this appeal to the Corinthians, and Galatians, when there were amongst them some persons disaffected to him, who were taking all opportunities to sink his character, and destroy his influence; and could they have wished for a better opportunity than such an appeal? An appeal which, had not the fact it supposed been certain, far from recovering those that were wavering in their esteem, must have been sufficient utterly to disgust his most cordial and steady friends.—And the same remark may be applied to the advices and reproofs, which the Apostle there gives relating to

the use and abuse of their spiritual gifts; which had been most notoriously absurd, and even ridiculous, had not the Christians to whom he wrote been really possessed of them. And these gifts were so plainly supernatural, that (as it has often been observed), if it be allowed that miracles can prove a divine revelation, and that the First Epistle to the Corinthians be genuine, (of which, by the way, there is at least as pregnant evidence as that any part of the New Testament is so,) then it follows, by a sure and easy consequence, that Christianity is true. Nevertheless other arguments are not to be forgot in this survey.—And therefore, as I have proved under this head, that had the testimony of the apostles been false, it is not to be imagined that they could have gained credit at all; and especially, when they had put the proof of their cause on such a footing, as we are sure they did. I am now to show you,

5. That it is certain in fact, that the apostles did gain early credit, and succeeded in a most wonderful manner; from whence it will follow, that their testimony was true.—That the apostles did indeed gain credit in the world, is evident, from what I before offered to prove, the early prevalence of Christianity in it; and may farther be confirmed from many passages in the New Testament. And here I insist, not so much on express historical testimonies, though some of them are very remarkable; especially that of the brethren at Jerusalem, who speak of many myriads of believing Jews assembled at the feast of Pentecost: but I argue from the epistles written to several churches, which plainly prove, that there were congregations of Christians in Rome, Corinth,

Ephesus, Colosse, Thessalonica, Philippi, Smyrna, Laodicea, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Crete, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, and many other places; in so much that one of the apostles could say, that Christ had so wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient, not only in word or profession, but in deed too, that from Jerusalem, even round about to Illyricum, he had fully preached the Gospel of Christ, or, as the word imports, had accomplished the purposes of it.—And there is a great deal of reason, both from the nature of the thing, and from the testimony of ancient history, to believe, that others of the apostles had considerable success elsewhere: so that Paul might with reason apply to them and their doctrine, what is originally spoken of the luminaries of heaven, and the instruction they communicate, "Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

So great was the number of those who were proselyted to Christianity, by the preaching of the apostles; and we have all imaginable reason to believe, that there were none of all these proselytes, but what were fully persuaded of the truth of the testimony they bore; for otherwise, no imaginable reason can be given for their entering themselves into such a profession. The apostles had no secular terrors to affright them, no secular rewards to bribe them, no dazzling eloquence to enchant them: on the contrary, all these were in a powerful manner pleading against the apostles; yet their testimony was received, and their new converts were so thoroughly satisfied with the evidence which they gave them of

their mission, that they encountered great persecutions, and cheerfully ventured estate, liberty, and life itself, on the truth of the facts they asserted; as plainly appears from many passages in the epistles, which none can think the apostles would ever have written, if these first Christians had not been in a persecuted condition.

Nor will it signify any thing to object, that most of these converts were persons of a low rank, and ordinary education, who therefore might be more easily imposed upon than others: for (not to mention Sergius Paulus, Dionysius the Areopagite, or the domestics of Cesar's household, with others of superior stations in life), it is sufficient to remind you, as I have largely shown, that the apostles did not put their cause on the issue of laboured arguments, in which the populace might quickly have been entangled and lost, but on such plain facts as they might judge of as easily and surely as any others; indeed on what they themselves saw, and in part too, on what they felt.

Now I apprehend, this might be sufficient to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion. You have seen, that as there is no reason to believe, that the apostles, who certainly knew the truth, would have attempted a fraud of this kind;—so, if they had attempted it, they could not possibly have succeeded;—nevertheless they did succeed in a very remarkable manner;—whence it plainly follows, that what they testified was true. And the reasonableness of receiving the Gospel, on admitting the truth of what they testified concerning Christ, is an easy consequence.

DISCOURSE III.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY, AND REFLECTIONS ON THE WHOLE.

As I had before proved the books of the New Testament to be genuine, I proceeded in my last discourse, to argue from thence the certain truth of the Christian revelation; and we have made some considerable progress in the argument.

The matter in short stands thus: The authors of the New Testament certainly knew whether the facts they asserted were true or false; so that they could not themselves be deceived:—Neither can we think they would attempt to deceive others, since they appear by their manner of writing to have been persons of great integrity and goodness: and it is likewise evident, they could have no temptation to attempt a fraud of this nature. However, if they had attempted it, we cannot imagine they could have gained credit in the world, if the facts they asserted had not been true: nevertheless they did gain credit in a very remarkable manner; from whence it plainly follows, that those facts were true.—Now I am to show farther, to complete the proof of our grand proposition,

6. That admitting the facts which they testified concerning Christ to be true, then it was reasonable for their contemporaries, and is reasonable for us, to receive the Gospel which they have transmitted to us, as a divine revelation.

The great thing they asserted was, that Jesus

was the Christ, and that he was proved to be so,—by prophecies accomplished in him,—and by miracles wrought by him, and by others in his name.—Let us attend to each of these, and I am persuaded we shall find them no contemptible arguments; but must be forced to acknowledge, that the premises being established, the conclusion most easily and necessarily follows: and this conclusion—that Jesus is the Christ,—taken in all its extent, is an abstract of the Gospel revelation, and, therefore, is sometimes put for the whole of it.

The apostles, especially when disputing with the Jews, did frequently argue from "the prophecies of the Old Testament;" in which, they say, many things were expressly foretold, which were most literally and exactly fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Now, greatly to the evidence, confirmation, and advantage of Christianity, so it is that these prophecies are to this day extant in their original language; and this in the hands of a people most implacably averse to the Gospel. So that an attentive reader may still, in a great measure, satisfy himself as to the validity of the argument drawn from them.

On searching these ancient and important records we find, not only in the general, that God intended to raise up for his people an illustrious deliverer, who, amongst other glorious titles, is sometimes called the MESSIAH, or the Anointed One; but we are more particularly told, that this great event should happen before the government ceased in the tribe of Judah, while the second temple was standing; and a little before its destruction, about 490 years after a command given to rebuild Jerusalem, which

was probably issued out in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, or, at least, within a few years before or after it.—It is predicted, that he should be of the seed of Abraham, born of a virgin of the house of David, in the town of Bethlehem; that he should be anointed with an extraordinary effusion of the Divine Spirit, in virtue of which, he should not only be a perfect and illustrious example of universal holiness and goodness, but should also perform many extraordinary and beneficial miracles; nevertheless, that, for want of external pomp and splendour, he should be rejected and insulted by the Jews, and at length be cut off and slain by them. It is added, that he should arise from the dead before his body should be corrupted in the grave; and should be received up to heaven, and there seated at the right hand of God: from whence he should, in a wonderful manner, pour out his Spirit on his followers; in consequence of which, though the body of the Jewish people perished in their obstinate opposition to him, yet the Gentiles should be brought to the knowledge of the true God, and a kingdom established amongst them, which, from small beginnings, should spread itself to the ends of the earth, and continue to the remotest ages.

Besides these most material circumstances, there were several others relating to him, which were either expressly foretold, or at least hinted at; all which, with those already mentioned, had so evident an accomplishment in Jesus, (allowing the truth of the facts which the apostles testified concerning him) that we have no reason to wonder that they should receive the word with all readiness, who searched the

Scriptures daily, whether these things were so predicted there, as the apostles affirmed. For I am persuaded, that no wise and religious person could imagine, that God would permit an impostor to arise, in whom so great a variety of predictions, delivered by so many different persons, and in so many distant ages, should have an exact accomplishment.

When the apostles were preaching to heathens, it is indeed true, that they generally waived the argument from prophecy, because they were not so capable judges of it; but then they insist on another, which might as soon captivate their belief, and as justly vindicate it. I mean, "the miracles performed by Christ, and by those commissioned and influenced by him." Many of these were of such a nature, as not to admit of any artifice or deceit; especially that most signal one of his resurrection from the dead, which I may call a miracle performed by, as well as upon, Christ; because he so expressly declares, that he had himself a power to resume his life at pleasure. The apostles well knew, this was a fact of such a nature, that they who believed this, would never doubt of the rest; they therefore often single this out, and lay the whole stress of their cause upon it. This they proved to be true, by their own testimony miraculously confirmed; and in proving this, they establish Christianity on an impregnable rock. For I may safely refer it to any of you to judge, whether it is an imaginable thing, that God should raise the dead body of an impostor; especially when he had solemnly appealed to such a resurrection, as the grand proof of his mission, and had expressly fixed the very day on which it was to happen.

I persuade myself you are convinced by all this, that they who on the apostles' testimony believed, that the prophecies of the Old Testament were accomplished in Jesus, and that God bore witness to him by miracles, and raised him from the dead, had abundant reason to believe, that the doctrine which Christ taught was divine, and his Gospel a revelation from heaven. And if they had reason to admit this conclusion, then it is plain, that we, who have such satisfactory evidence on the one hand, that the testimony of the apostles was credible, and on the other, that this was the substance of it, have reason also to admit this grand inference from it, and to embrace the Gospel as a faithful saying, and as well worthy of all acceptation. This is the thing I was attempting to prove. And here I should end the argument, were it not for the confirmation it may receive from some additional considerations, which could not properly be introduced under any of the preceding heads. I add, therefore,

7. In the last place, that the truth of the Gospel has received farther, and very considerable confirmation, from what has happened in the world since it was first published.—And here I must desire you, more particularly to consider, on the one hand, what God has been doing to establish it;—and, on the other, the methods which its enemies have been taking to destroy it.

1. Consider what God has been doing to confirm the Gospel since its first publication, and you will find it a farther evidence of its divine original.—I might here argue at large, from its surprising propagation in the world;—from the miraculous powers

with which not only the apostles, but succeeding preachers of the Gospel, and other converts, were endowed;—from the accomplishment of prophecies recorded in the New Testament;—and from the preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, notwithstanding the various difficulties and persecutions through which they have passed.

I might particularly urge, in confirmation of the truth of Christianity, "the wonderful success with which it was attended, and the surprising propagation of the Gospel in the world."

I have before endeavoured, under a former head, to show you, that the Gospel met with so favourable a reception in the world, as evidently proved, that its first publishers were capable of producing such evidence of its truth, as an imposture could not admit. But now I carry the remark farther, and assert, that, considering the circumstances of the case, it is amazing that even truth itself, under so many disadvantages, should have so illustrious a triumph; and that its wonderful success does evidently argue such an extraordinary interposition of God in its favour, as might justly be called a miraculous attestation to it.

There was not only one of a family, or two of a city taken and brought to Zion; but so did the Lord hasten it in its appointed time, that "a little one became a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." And as the apostles themselves were honoured with very remarkable success, so this divine seed was propagated so fast in the next age, that Pliny testifies, "he found the heathen temples in Achaia almost deserted;" and Tertullian afterwards boasts, "that

all places but those temples were filled with Christians; so that, were they only to withdraw, cities and provinces would be depopulated." Nor did the Gospel only triumph thus within the boundaries of the Roman empire; for long before Tertullian was born, Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew, which seems to have been written not much above 100 years after Christ's death, declares, "that there was no nation of men, whether Greeks or barbarians, not excepting these savages, that wandered in clans from one region to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learned to offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of Jesus who was crucified."

Now, how can we account for such a scene as this, but by saying, that the hand of the Lord was with the first preachers of the Gospel, and therefore such multitudes believed, and turned unto the Lord? How had it been possible, that so small a fountain should presently have swelled into a mighty river, and even have covered the face of the earth, had it not sprung from the sanctuary of God, and been rendered thus triumphant by his Almighty arm!

Had this new religion, so directly contrary to all the prejudices of education, been contrived to soothe men's vices, to assert their errors, to defend their superstitions, or to promote their secular interest, we might easily have accounted for its prevalence in the world. Had its preachers been very profound philosophers, or polite and fashionable orators, many might have been charmed, at least for a while, to follow them; or had the princes and potentates of the earth declared themselves its patrons, and armed

their legions for its defence and propagation, multitudes might have been terrified into the profession, though not a soul could, by such means, have been rationally persuaded to the belief of it. But without some such advantages as these, we can hardly conceive, how any new religion should so strangely prevail; even though it had crept into the world in its darkest ages, and most barbarous countries, and though it had been gradually proposed in the most artful manner, with the finest veil industriously drawn over every part, which might at first have given disgust to the beholder.

But you well know, that the very reverse of all this was the case here. You know, from the apparent constitution of Christianity, that the lusts and errors, the superstitions and interests of carnal men, would immediately rise up against it as a most irreconcilable enemy. You know that the learning and wit of the Greeks, and the Romans, were early employed to overbear and ridicule it. You know, that as all the herd of heathen deities were to be discarded, the priests, who subsisted on that craft, must in interest find themselves obliged to oppose it. You know, that the princes of the earth drew the sword against it, and armed torments and death for the destruction of its followers. And yet, you see that it triumphed over all, though published in ages and places of the greatest learning and refinement; and proposed, not in an ornamental and artificial manner, but with the utmost plainness: the doctrines of the cross being always avowed as its grand fundamentals, though so notorious a stumbling-block both to the Jews and Gentiles; (and the ab-

solute necessity, not only of embracing Christianity, but also of renouncing all idol-worship, being insisted on immediately, and in the strongest terms, though it must make the Gospel appear the most singular and unsociable religion that had ever been taught in the world.)

Had one of the wits, or politicians, of these ages seen the apostles, and a few other plain men, who had been educated amongst the lowest of the people, as most of the first teachers of Christianity were, going out armed with nothing but faith, truth, and goodness, to encounter the power of princes, the bigotry of priests, the learning of philosophers, the rage of the populace, and the prejudice of all; how would he have derided the attempt, and said, with Sanballat, What will these feeble Jews do? But had he seen the event, surely he must have owned, with the Egyptian Magi, in a far less illustrious miracle, that it was the finger of God, and might have justly fallen on his face, even amongst those whom he had insulted, with an humble acknowledgment that God was in them of a truth.

I might here farther urge "those miracles which were wrought in confirmation of the Christian doctrine, for a considerable time after the death of the apostles." The most signal, and best attested of these, was the dispossession of devils; whom God seems to have permitted to rage with an unusual violence about those times, that his Son's triumph over them might be so much the more remarkable, and that the old serpent might be taken in his own craftiness. I doubt not but many of you have heard, that more than two hundred years after the

death of Christ, some of the most celebrated defenders of the Gospel, which the church has in any age produced, I mean Tertullian, and Minutius Felix, do not only challenge any of their heathen enemies and persecutors, to bring them a demoniac, engaging at the hazard of their lives, to oblige the evil spirit, in the name, and by the authority of Christ, to quit his possession; but do also appeal to it as a fact publicly known, that those who were agitated by such spirits, stood terrified and amazed in the presence of a Christian, and that their pretended gods were compelled then to confess themselves devils.

I waive the testimonies of some later writers of the Christian church, lest the credulity of their temper, joined with the circumstances attending some of the facts they record, should furnish out objections against their testimony; though I think we cannot, without great injustice to the character of the learned and pious Augustine, suspect the truth of some amazing facts of this kind, which he has attested, as of his own personal and certain knowledge.

Nor must I on this occasion forget to mention "the accomplishment of several prophecies, recorded in the New Testament," as a farther confirmation given by God to the Gospel.

The most eminent and signal instance under this head, is that of our Lord's prediction concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, as it is recorded by St. Matthew in his 24th chapter. The tragical history of it is most circumstantially described by Josephus, a Jewish priest, who was an eye-witness

of it; and the description he has given of this sad calamity, so exactly corresponds to the prophecy, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it had been written by a Christian, on purpose to illustrate it. And one can never enough admire that series of amazing providences, by which the author was preserved from most imminent danger, that he might leave us that invaluable treasure which his writings contain.

We have no need of any farther evidence than we find in him, of the exact accomplishment of what was prophesied concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. But our Lord had also foretold the long continued desolation of their temple; and I cannot forbear reminding you of the awful sanction which was given to that part of the prediction; for it is well known that a heathen historian has assured us, that when Julian the apostate, in deliberate contempt of that prediction, solemnly and resolutely undertook to rebuild it, his impious design was miraculously frustrated again and again, and the workmen consumed by globes of fire, which broke out from the foundations.

The prediction of St. Paul concerning the man of sin, and the apostacy of the latter times, is also well worthy of our remark. And though a great deal of the book of Revelation be still concealed under a dark veil, yet the division of the Roman empire into ten kingdoms, the usurpation, persecutions, and idolatry of the Romish church, and the long duration of the papal power, with several other extraordinary events, which no human prudence could have foreseen, and which have happened

long since the publication of that book, are so clearly foretold there, that I cannot but look on that part of Scripture as an invaluable treasure; and think it not at all improbable, that the more visible accomplishment of some of its other prophecies may be a great means of reviving the Christian cause, which is at present so much on the decline.

"The preservation of the Jews as a distinct people," is another particular under this head, which well deserves our attentive regard.

It is plain they are vastly numerous, notwithstanding all the slaughter and destruction of this people, in former and in later ages. They are dispersed in various most distant nations, and particularly in those parts of the world where Christianity is professed. And though they are exposed to great hatred and contempt, on account of their different faith, and in most places subjected to civil incapacities, if not to unchristian severities; yet they are still most obstinately tenacious of their religion; which is the more wonderful, as their fathers were so prone to apostatize from it; and as most of them seem to be utter strangers, either to piety or humanity, and pour the greatest contempt on the moral precepts of their own law, while they are so attached to the ceremonial institutions of it, troublesome and inconvenient as they are. Now, seriously reflect, what an evident hand of providence is here; that, by their dispersion, preservation, and adherence to their religion, it should come to pass, that Christians should daily see the accomplishment of many remarkable prophecies concerning this people; and that we should always have amongst us, such a

crowd of unexceptionable witnesses to the truth of those ancient Hebrew records, on which so much of the evidence of the Gospel depends. Records, which are many of them so full to the purpose for which we allege them, that, as a celebrated writer very well observes, "had the whole body of the Jewish nation been converted to Christianity, men would certainly have thought, they had been forged by Christians, and have looked upon them, with the prophecies of the Sybils, as made many years after the events they pretend to foretell." And, to add no more here, the preservation of the Jews as a distinct people, evidently leaves room for the accomplishment of those Old and New Testament promises, which relate to their national conversion and restoration; whereas that would be impossible in itself, or at least impossible to be known, if they were promiscuously blended with other people. On the whole, it is such a scene in the conduct of Providence, as I am well assured cannot be paralleled in the history of any other nation on earth, and affords a most obvious and important argument in favour of the Gospel.

Thus has Christianity been farther confirmed, since its first publication, by what God has done to establish it. It only remains, that we consider,

2. What confirmation it receives from the methods which its enemies have taken to destroy it.—And these have generally been, either persecution or falsehood, or cavilling at some particulars in the Revelation, without entering into the grand argument on which it is built, and fairly debating what

is offered in its defence. Now, who would not think the better of a cause for being thus attacked?

At first you know, that the professors, and especially the preachers of the gospel, were severely persecuted. In every city bonds and imprisonments awaited them. As soon as ever the apostles began to preach Jesus and his resurrection, the Jewish rulers laid hold on them, and having confined and scourged them, strictly prohibited their speaking any more in that name. A little while after, Stephen was murdered, and afterwards James, and some other of the apostles. Now, certainly such a conduct did evidently show a consciousness, that they were not able to answer the apostles, and to support their own cause by the fair methods of reason and argument; to which, so far as the history informs us, they made no pretence; but attempted to bear them down by dint of authority, and to silence them by brutal force.

The time would fail me, should I attempt particularly to show, how these unrighteous methods were pursued in succeeding ages, and distant countries. The savage cruelties of Nero to these innocent and holy men were such, as raised the pity even of their enemies. Yet this was one of the least extensive and destructive of the ten general persecutions, which arose in the Roman Empire, besides several others in the neighbouring countries, of which ecclesiastical history informs us. These early enemies of the Gospel added falsehood and slander to their inhumanities. They endeavoured to murder the reputation of the Christians, as well as their persons, and were not ashamed to represent them as haters of the whole human species, for no imaginable

reason, but because they would not associate themselves in their idolatrous worship, but with regard to charity and truth, were strongly bearing their testimony against it. Nay, they charged them with human sacrifices, incest, idolatry, and all the crimes for which themselves, and their foolish gods, were indeed justly detestable; but from which the Christians knew how to vindicate themselves, highly to their own honour, and to the everlasting reproach of these malignant and pestilent accusers. And they have not failed to do it in many noble apologies, which, through the divine providence, are transmitted to us, and are incomparably the most valuable of any ancient uninspired writings.

Such were the infamous and scandalous methods, by which the Gospel was opposed in the earliest ages of the Church; and I cannot forbear adding, "that the measures more lately taken to subvert it, especially amongst ourselves, seem to me rather to reflect a glory upon it." Its unhappy enemies have been told again and again, that we put the proof of it on plain fact. They themselves do not, and cannot deny, that it prevailed early in the world, as we have shown at large. There must have been some man, or body of men, who first introduced it. They generally confess, that Christ and his apostles were the persons; and these apostles, (on whose testimony what we know of Christ chiefly depends,) must have been enthusiasts, or impostors, if their testimony was false. Now, which of these schemes will the unbeliever take? It seems that the Deists of the present age fix on neither, as being secretly conscious they can support neither; but they content them-

selves with cavilling at same circumstances attending the Revelation, without daring to encounter its grand evidence; that is, they have been laboriously attempting to prove it to be improbable, or absurd, to suppose that to have been, which, nevertheless, plainly appears to have been fact. One most weakly and sophistically pretends to prove, in defiance of the common sense of mankind, that the light of nature is a perfect rule, and, therefore, that all revelation is needless, and indeed impossible. Another disguises the miracles of Christ, by false and foolish representations of them, and then sets himself to ridicule them as idle tales. And a third takes a great deal of fruitless pains to show, that some prophecies referred to in the New Testament are capable of another sense, different from that in which the apostles have taken them. These things have been set in a very artful and fallacious light by persons, whose names will be perhaps transmitted to posterity, with the infamous glory of having been leaders in the cause of infidelity; but not a man of them undertakes directly to answer what has been said to ascertain the grand fact. Nay, they generally take no more notice of the positive evidence by which it is even demonstrated, than if they had never heard it proposed; though they cavil at incidental passages in those books in which it is most clearly stated. And as for what they have urged, though perhaps some, who before were weary of Christianity, may have taken occasion from their writings to reject it; and others, for want of consulting the answers to them, may have been unwarily ensnared; yet the examination of these points has

been greatly for the honour and vindication of the truth, which seems, on this occasion, to have been set in a clearer and stronger light than ever, at least in these later ages.

The cause of Christianity has greatly gained by debate, and the Gospel comes like fine gold out of the furnace, which the more it is tried, the more it is approved. I own, the defenders of the Gospel have appeared with very different degrees of ability for the work; nor could it be otherwise amongst such numbers of them. But, on the whole, though the patrons of infidelity have been masters of some wit, humour, and address, as well as of a moderate share of learning; and generally much more than a moderate share of assurance; yet, so great is the force of truth, that (unless we may except those writers who have unhappily called for the aid of the civil magistrate in the controversy,) I cannot recollect, that I have seen any defence of the Gospel, which has not, on the whole, been sufficient to establish it, notwithstanding all the sophistical arguments of its most subtile antagonists.

This is an observation, which is continually gaining new strength, as new assaults are made upon the Gospel. And I cannot forbear saying, that, as if it were by a kind of judicial infatuation, some who have distinguished themselves in the wretched cause of infidelity, have been permitted to fall into such gross misrepresentations, such senseless inconsistencies, and such palpable falsehoods, and, in a word, into such a various and malignant superfluity of naughtiness; that, to a wise and pious mind, they must appear like those venemous creatures, which

are said to carry an antidote in their bowels against their own poison. A virtuous and well-bred Deist must turn away from some modern pieces of this kind with scorn and abhorrence; and a Christian might almost be tempted to wish, that the books, with all their scandals about them, might be transmitted to posterity, lest when they came to live, like the writings of some of the ancient heathens, only in those of their learned and pious answerers, it should hardly be credited, that ever the enemies of the Gospel, in such an enlightened age, should be capable of so much impiety and folly.

Thus I have given you a brief view of the chief arguments in proof of Christianity; and the sum of the whole is this:—

The gospel is probable in theory: as considering the nature of God, and the circumstances of mankind, there was reason to hope a revelation might be given; and if any were given, we should naturally apprehend its internal evidence would be such as that of the Gospel is, and its external such as it is said to be. But it is also true in fact, for Christianity was early professed, as it was first introduced by Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and doctrines were published by his immediate attendants; whose books are preserved still in their original language, and in the main are faithfully translated into our own. So that the books of the New Testament, now in your hands, may be depended upon, as written by the persons whose names they bear. And admitting this, the truth of the Gospel follows by a train of very easy consequences; for the authors certainly knew the truth of the facts they relate; and considering what

appears of their character and circumstances, we can never believe they would have attempted to deceive us; or if they had, that they could have gained credit in the world; yet they did gain it in a remarkable manner; therefore the facts they attested are true. And the truth of the Gospel evidently follows from the certainty of these facts, and is much confirmed by what has happened in the world since the first publication of it.

I shall conclude what I have to say on this subject with a few words by way of reflection.

1. Let us gratefully acknowledge the divine goodness, in favouring us with so excellent a revelation, and confirming it to us by such an ample evidence. We should be daily adoring the God of nature, for lighting up the sun, that glorious, though imperfect image of his own unapproachable lustre, and appointing it to gild the earth with its various rays, to cheer us with its benign influences, and to guide and direct us in our journeys and our labours. But how incomparably more valuable, is that day-spring from on high which has visited us, that Sun of Righteousness which is risen upon us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace? Oh Christians, (for I now address myself to you, whose eyes are so happy as indeed to see, and your ears as to hear,) what reason have you for daily and hourly praise! when your minds are delighted with contemplating the riches of Gospel-grace, when you view, with wonder and joy, the harmonious contrivance of our redemption, when you feel the burden of your guilt removed, the freedom

of your address to the throne of grace encouraged, and see the prospect of a fair inheritance of eternal glory opening upon you; then, in the pleasing transport of your souls, borrow the joyful anthem of the Psalmist, and say, with the humblest gratitude and self-resignation, "God is the Lord, who hath given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar." Adore God, who first commanded light to shine out of darkness, that, by the discoveries of his word, and the operations of his Spirit, he has shined in your hearts, to give you the knowledge of his glory, as reflected from the face of his Son. Let us all adore him, that this revelation hath reached us, who live in an age and country so distant from that in which it first appeared; while there are to this day, not only dark corners, but regions of the earth, which are full of the habitations of idolatry and cruelty.

Let me here peculiarly address myself to those whose education and circumstances of life have given them opportunities of a fuller inquiry into the state of those ancient or modern nations, that have been left merely to the light of unassisted reason; even to you, sirs, who are acquainted with the history of their gods, the rites of their priests, the tales, and even the hymns of their poets, (those beautiful trifles,) nay, I will add, the reasonings of their sagest philosophers, all the precarious, and all the erroneous things they have said, where religion and immortality are concerned. I have sometimes thought that God gave to some of the most celebrated Pagan writers that uncommon share of genius and eloquence, that they might, as it were, by their art, embalm the

monsters of antiquity; that so succeeding ages might see, in a more affecting view than we could otherwise have done, how weak the human mind is in its best estate, and the need which the greatest as well as the meanest of mankind have, of being taught by a revelation from above. Permit me to remind you, that while you are daily conversing with such monuments as these, (as I know some of you are,) and are also surveying the evidences of Christianity in a larger and more distinct view, than it was proper for me here to propose them, you are under peculiar obligations, to be very thankful for the Gospel yourselves, as well as to compassionate the case of those to whom it has never been offered, or by whom it is slighted. And this leads me to another reflection:

2. What reason have we to pity those, who reject this glorious Gospel, even when they have opportunities of inquiring into its clearest evidences?—Such undoubtedly there are in our own age and nation; and surely we should sometimes bestow a compassionate thought upon them, and lift up an humble prayer for them: if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are now led captive by him at his pleasure. We should pity Heathens and Mahometans, under their darkness and errors; but how much more deplorable is the case of those, who, though they dwell in Emmanuel's land, and in the valley of vision, turn it into the valley of the shadow of death, by closing their eyes against so bright a lustre, and stopping their ears against the voice of the charmer! They are indeed in their own conceit the only people,

and wisdom will die with them; so that to be sure they will scorn our pity; but who can forbear it? Is there a more melancholy thought than this, that the Son of God should have done so much to introduce and establish the Gospel, and his Spirit so much to perpetuate and increase its evidence, and that, after all, it should be contemptuously despised, even by creatures who are perishing without it? That the blessed Jesus, instead of being received with open arms as the great deliverer, should either be treated as an empty name, or, if acknowledged to be a real person, should then be represented as a visionary enthusiast, or a wicked impostor; for there is no other alternative! and this, not only (though I believe most frequently,) by men of profligate and abandoned lives, but sometimes by persons of external morality and decency, of great humanity and sweetness of temper, (for such I know are to be found amongst them,) as well as men of wit and genius, of politeness and learning, of human prudence and experience in affairs. I may also add, that it is the case of some, who were the children of pious parents, who were trained up in religious exercises, who once discovered serious impressions, and gave very encouraging hopes. Alas, whither are they fallen! And whither have we reason to fear they will at length fall! How shall we shelter those that were once our brethren, that are perhaps still our friends, from the awful sentence which the Gospel denounces against all that reject it, without any exception? As to the wretches, that add insult and derision to their infidelity, I tremble to think of that load of guilt which they are bringing on themselves,

and how near they approach to the unpardonable sin, if they have not already committed it. For the rest, who behave in a more modest and sober manner, it will no doubt be a very difficult task to convince them; and so much the rather, as some of them, by too easy a transition, have renounced many of the most important principles of natural religion, nay, I might add, even the whole of it, together with the Christian revelation. But the influences of divine grace are almighty; let us recommend them to these, and omit no other proper method, either of recovering those who are already seduced, or at least of securing those who are not yet infected, but may be (as most of the youth are, especially in the most populous places) in imminent danger of the contagion. To this end let me add,

3. How reasonable is it, that Christians should form a familiar acquaintance with the great evidences of our own common faith.—It is what we so apparently owe to the honour of God, to the interest of Christ, to the peace of our own souls, and the edification of others, that I hope I need not urge it at large; especially considering what was said in the introduction to these discourses. In consequence of all, let it be your care to make the evidences of Christianity the subject of your serious reflections, and of your frequent converse: especially study your Bibles, where there are such marks of truth and divinity to be found, that I believe few that have familiary known them, and have had a relish for them, were ever brought to make shipwreck of the faith as it is in Jesus. Above all, let it be your care to act on the rules which are here laid down;

and then you will find your faith growing in a happy proportion, and will experience the truth of our Saviour's declaration, that if any man will resolutely and faithfully do his will, he shall know of the Christian doctrine whether it be of God. I verily believe, it is the purity of its precepts which lies at the bottom of most men's opposition to it; or a natural pride of heart, which gives them an aversion to so humbling a scheme, or a fond affectation of seeming wiser than others, in rejecting what most of their neighbours do at least profess to believe. When these unhappy prejudices and conceptions are by divine grace conquered and rooted out, the evidence of truth will daily appear with an increasing lustre; as the light of the sun does to an eye recovering from a film, with which it had been overgrown, and which before had veiled it with midnight in the midst of noon. Once more,

4. How solicitous should we be to embrace and obey that Gospel, which comes attended with such abundant evidences!

I may undoubtedly address myself to most of you, my friends, and say as Paul did to King Agrippa, Believest thou the prophets? and I may add, the evangelists and the apostles?—Yes, I know that you believe them: yet let me entreat and charge you, not to rest here, but attentively to examine how far your hearts are affected and your lives regulated by such a belief. The Christian revelation is a practical thing; and it is heard, it is believed, it is professed, and even defended in vain, if it be not obeyed.—Therefore do we so frequently read of obeying the truth, and obeying the Gospel, as a matter of so great importance.

In this Gospel, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; but it is revealed with redoubled terror against that audacious sinner who holds the truth in unrighteousness. In this Gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted both as a Prince and a Saviour; and it is not with impunity that the impenitent rebel can reject his yoke, and trample on his blood: for if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment, than even a capital execution, must they be thought worthy, who have poured contempt on such a Sovereign, and on such a Redeemer?

Oh let it be most seriously and frequently recollected, that this Gospel is the touchstone, by which you are another day to be tried; the balance in which an impartial Judge will weigh you; and must on the whole prove your everlasting triumph, or your everlasting torment. The blessed God did not introduce it with such solemn notice, such high expectation, such pompous miracles, such awful sanctions, that men might reject or dishonour it at pleasure; but it will certainly be found, to the greatest and the meanest of those that hear it, a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death.

Let it therefore be your immediate care, to inquire which of these it is likely to prove to your souls; since it is so far from being a vain thing, that it is really your very life. If it has hitherto been despised, and that blessed Redeemer, in whom it so apparently centres, has been neglected; remember that all which has been said in confirmation of its truth, does but in effect prove that the hand-writing

of God himself is set to the sentence of your eternal condemnation. Oh, therefore, allow not yourselves a moment's rest, till you have, with humble submission applied to His throne, while yet there is hope that it may be reversed.

And as for you, my brethren, who have received Christ Jesus the Lord, be exhorted to walk in him; since it is the design of his Gospel to teach us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly; and this, not only as you have so comfortable an assurance, that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord, but as it will be on the whole, the most effectual method you can take in your respective stations to promote the Gospel. If you indeed honour it and love it, and desire it may be propagated in the world, let it be your care, not only to defend it by your tongues, but to adorn it by your lives; and in the words of that great champion in this sacred cause, "Be blameless and harmless, the children of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining amongst them as lights in the world, and so holding forth the word of life;" and perhaps it may serve, not only to entertain their eyes with wonder and glory, but to guide their feet into the way of peace, and may engage them also to join with you in glorifying your Father which is in heaven. Amen.

THE

DIVINITY

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION,

PROVED BY THE

EVIDENCE OF REASON, AND DIVINE REVELATION.

BY

WILLIAM BATES, D. D.

THE

DIVINITY

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

CHAPTER I.

Religion necessary for the honour of God and happiness of man. The truth of the Christian religion made evident by comparing it with all other religions.

That God is the Maker of the world; that he observes our moral actions, and will require an account of them in the future state, and distribute eternal recompenses accordingly, has been proved by such invincible evidence that reason cannot resist. It follows, therefore, that religion is necessary both for the honour of God, and the happiness of man. For we cannot conceive, but that the wise Creator, in making all things, designed his own glory, both in the manifestation of his own perfections, and that they should be acknowledged and reverenced, loved and praised, by intelligent creatures. This is a natural duty, to which mankind, with an unforced consent, agrees. For, as honour, in the general, is the homage paid to conspicuous excellencies, and specially to beneficent virtues; so religion, that is

the highest honour, is justly due to God the most sovereign being in all perfections, and our sovereign Benefactor. And it is equally clear, that the happiness of man depends on religion. For if God regard the actions of men, not with a naked speculative knowledge, but with an eye of providence and judgment; if he will accept and reward our services not as profitable to him, but as the just expressions of our love, thankfulness, and obedience to him, it is requisite our prime care should be to serve him. In this, the greatest duty and supreme interest of men are inviolably united; for what obligation can possibly be equal to that of pleasing our Maker and Preserver? And what is comparable to the interest of eternity? From hence there is a general inclination in men to worship the Deity, impressed from the author of nature; but the ways are diverse. Religion assumes a different shape in different countries, and the rites that are observed by some nations as sacred, are rejected by others as impious, or vain. Now, in this variety of religions, each contrary to the other, it is necessary to consider which is that special way of serving God that is only pleasing to him. If a traveller be distracted between several ways, he will inquire which leads to his journey's end, and not go on with uncertainty. And is it not infinitely reasonable to do that in the most important affair, which any person will do in the most ordinary? To be indifferent in a matter so deeply concerning us, is prodigious above all wonder. For if the means we use to obtain the favour of God, provoke his anger, our misery is remediless. But, alas! no rashness is so common,

as that of men's preferring one religion before another.

How many false religions are defended by whole nations with that zeal as if they were the most assured persons? When the foundations of their belief and adherence are so weak, did they call reason to counsel, they must be convinced of their errors. They are led by vain regards to their progenitors, from whom their religion is derived; and what they receive at first without examination, they never distrust; as if the first instructions were always true. Nay, the Christian religion, though shining with an extraordinary lustre, which justifies it to every one that will but open his eyes to consider it, is yet as injudiciously and carelessly received, as the vainest religion in the world. There are innumerable Christians in name, without any solid conviction in their minds, or divine change in their hearts, the effects of its truth and goodness. They are disciples of Christ, as the Turks are of Mahomet, by the sole impression of example.

In discussing this matter, I shall proceed upon such principles as are evident to the human understanding. It is a common principle acknowledged by all men, 'That God alone is to prescribe that way and order of service wherein he will be honoured.' For this reason, those who in any nation introduced a form of religion, always pretended to have divine direction for it. Now that God has signified his will to men in this most important matter, it is most reasonable to believe. An ancient philosopher observes, that such is the providence of nature, that the most necessary arts for

the support of life are easily learned of all. And if the divine providence has such a tender care of man, as to make the knowledge of such things easy as are requisite for the temporal life, it is reasonable to believe he has not left him destitute of those means that are necessary for the obtaining eternal life. Now that the Christian religion alone is true, will fully appear,

I. By comparing it with other religions, that upon trial are proved to be false, or that they are infinitely excelled by the Christian in those things wherein they have any resemblance or degrees of truth and goodness.

II. By considering it directly, as to its intrinsic excellencies, and those external supernatural operations, that are the express characters of God's hand, which afford an infallible testimony of his approving it.

Before the coming of Christ into the world there were two sorts of religions, Gentilism and Judaism. The first is utterly excluded on account of its gross and palpable contrariety to the principles of sound reason.

1. By a fundamental error in the object of worship. Idolatry then spread through all the regions under both the hemispheres. Now it is evident, by reason, there is but one true God, an infinite being, the Maker and Governor of all things, that has alone divine excellencies in himself, and a divine empire over us, and, consequently, is alone worthy of supreme honour. And what greater indignity can be offered to him, than the placing of idols in his throne? He is a jealous God, sensible and severe; and will not suffer any partner in his worship. His

honour is eminently concerned to vindicate his despised Deity. It is a pitiful shift to allege that they honoured their inferior gods with a lower and imperfect worship: for all divine worship is supreme, and to be given only to the supreme God. Besides, what more debases man, than to consecrate the flower of his esteem and affections to unworthy objects, and many times to things wherein were no signs of life, much less any ray of divinity? It is evident, therefore, that the numerous sects of superstition were involved in the most wretched ignorance of God and themselves. And it is observable, that no quarrels were raised amongst the heathens about the several gods they worshipped. For the devil, the irreconcilable enemy to God's glory and man's happiness, was pleased with their deadly errors. Let them adore the host of heaven or of the earth, it was alike to him: for they all diverted the minds of men from the sole object of divine worship, the true God.

2. Gentilism was equally culpable in the manner of worship. Those who made gods to themselves, ordained their service according to their fancies. But the true God that made man will be worshipped according to his own appointment. Now, if we consider that unintelligible variety of religions amongst the heathens, we shall have reason to conclude, that there is no instance wherein the excess of man's native blindness and depravation is more astonishing, than in the ways he has devised for the serving of God.

The Grecians and Romans had more art and improvement than the rest, yet how frivolous and ex-

travagant, nay, how impious were their solemn mysteries? Their most sacred mysteries were a covert for uncleanness, and under the mask of religion the basest villanies were disguised. Now what is more impious than to imagine that God is pleased with the most sordid lusts, that cannot be named without violating modesty, nor thought of without defiling the mind with their infamous ideas? But it is no wonder that such pollutions were esteemed religious rites, for they attributed to their gods such actions as were most unworthy a virtuous man. And what a pernicious influence this kind of belief had upon them, and how dishonourable it was to their gods, the wiser sort then discovered. It was Cicero's just censure of Homer, that whereas he should have raised up earth to heaven, instructing men to live according to the purity of the gods, he forced down heaven to earth, and made the gods to live like men in this region of impurity. It is the highest glory of man to be made in the image of God in moral excellencies, and it is the vilest contumely to God to fashion him to be the image of man's vicious affections.

Add further, that man was a sinner, and under the righteous displeasure of heaven, all were compelled to acknowledge by the stings of conscience. But what miserable work has been made from the ignorance and guilty fears of the heathens, to render the Deity propitious, is manifest in several instances, and especially in their cruel sacrifices of men. This was their practice in extreme dangers, to purge their cities, and avert divine judgments. As if some eminent acts of sin had the virtue of ex-

piation. In short, the design of religion is to procure the favour of God, and to sanctify man, both which are necessary in order to his blessedness; but how insufficient Gentilism was for these great objects is manifest. Nay, on the contrary, such a prodigious mixture of folly and wickedness makes it sadly evident, that the variety of religions among the heathens, were but several ways of dishonouring God, and perishing for ever. It is further to be observed, that the philosophers of greatest reputation, who were admired as oracles of more than human wisdom, did not cure these destructive evils. They should have expressed a heroic magnanimity (to which they vainly pretended) in resisting the dreadful torrent of idolatry that overflowed the world. But they basely temporized with the vulgar heathen. It was their declared principle, that a wise man should follow the religion of his country, and conform, in his external practice, with established customs, if he reserved his mind free from philosophy. Thus they extinguished the most radiant beam of the Deity, and robbed him of his most glorious attribute, the unity of his essence. And by this we may judge how unfit they were to instruct and correct the degenerate world, and make it truly better, when they suffered religion, the fountain of all virtues, to be corrupted, and the worship of the only true God, the prime and chief part of piety, to be given not only to inferior objects, but to evil spirits. Miserable physicians! Whose care was applied to redress some lesser evils that concerned society, and neglected this mortal wound in the heart. It is a killing aggravation of their conni-

vance and compliance with ignorant idolaters, that they held the "truth in unrighteousness; and when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but changed the glory of his incorruptible nature, into an image made like to corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." This was the state of the Pagan world till the Gospel appeared, and directed the natural religious inclination of mankind into its proper channel to the only true God.

2. The religion of the Jews is next to be considered. This the Christians acknowledge with them, was divine in its authority, doctrine, moral part, worship, and promises. God himself was the author, and confirmed it by many illustrious miracles. It is delivered in the most ancient, authentic, and venerable writings in the world. It instructs us concerning the nature of God, his works of creation and providence, and the judgment to come. It commands the love of God, to serve him only, and the love of our neighbour as ourselves. The ceremonial part was a full conviction of the guilt of sin, a visible discovery of the rights of eternal justice, and a powerful means to humble men before the infinite and offended majesty of the Creator. It propounds temporal rewards, as the marks of God's favour suitable to the church then in its minority, but under that veil the most excellent and eternal rewards. This religion, in its ceremonial external part, was to continue till the coming of the Messiah, and then to be abolished. To make this evident, I shall thus proceed:

(1.) That the ceremonial part contained nothing

that was morally and unchangeably good, for then it had been obligatory to all nations from the beginning; whereas it was prescribed only to the Jews, and after a long space of time, wherein many holy men, though ignorant of that part of the law, yet received a divine testimony, that they pleased God.

(2.) It was of impossible performance to all other nations; as appears by the precepts concerning sacrifices that were to be offered only in Jerusalem, and by the Levitical priests, and their solemn festivals so many times in the year. Now the worship of God being an essential duty of the reasonable creature, it is absurd to imagine that it necessarily consists in such things that cannot be done by all men.

(3.) God himself often declared, that the rituals of the law were of no price with him, absolutely considered. Isa. i. Psal. l.

(4.) They were enjoined the Jews for peculiar reasons; principally, that by those imperfect rudiments they might be prepared for the times of reformation. God had drawn, in the legal ministration, numberless images of the Messiah; their temple and high-priest, their ark and offerings, with all their ceremonial service, did signally point to him. And this is an infallible evidence, that a mind superior to Moses', designed all that work with a final respect to Christ, that the Jewish nation, having the idea of him always present, might not mistake him when he should appear. And that heavy yoke of ceremonies, with the spirit of servile fear that attended it, was to excite in them earnest longings after the Messiah, the Desire of all nations, that with unspeakable joy they might receive him at his coming.

Now, that the legal institution should expire for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, and a divine sacrifice be offered up, of infinite value and virtue, to reconcile us to God, and purify the consciences of men, was declared whilst the service of the temple was performed with the greatest pomp. Thus the Messiah spake by the mouth of David: "Sacrifice and offering thou dost not desire, my heart hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required; then said I, Lo I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God." And the same inspired prophet declared, when the Levitical priesthood was in the greatest splendour, that there was another order of the priesthood than that of Aaron, established in a more solemn manner, and of everlasting efficacy: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." That this prophecy respected the Messiah, even the Pharisees could not deny, for when Jesus Christ asked them whose son Christ was to be? They answered, David's. And demanding again, why David called him Lord, in those words of the Psalmist, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou at my right hand, till I have made thine enemies thy footstool?" They could answer nothing. Their silence was a clear acknowledgment that the Messiah was the person there intended. The Apostle also, who wrote to the Jews, takes it for granted, by the universal consent of that nation, that that Psalm respected the Messiah, and proves it was accomplished in Jesus Christ. Besides, it was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah, that another covenant

should be made, wherein the real benefits of the pardon of sin, and true holiness, that were typified by the legal purifications and observances, should be conferred on God's people: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, different from that made with their fathers when they came out of the land of Egypt, I will put my law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall no more teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall know me from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquities, and I will remember their sin no more." In short, there are abundant declarations in the prophets, that the carnal religion of the Jews should expire, and a religion all spirit and life should succeed in its place, and be diffused among all nations. This was to be introduced by the Messiah. Thus Moses foretold, "The Lord thy God shall raise up a prophet from among thy brethren like unto me, him ye shall hear." It was the singular prerogative of Moses above the rest of the prophets, that he was a lawgiver, and mediator of the covenant between God and Israel, and accordingly, the Messiah was to be a lawgiver and mediator of a new covenant. Now if the Mosaic institutions were to remain after his coming, the parallel would not hold between them in those principal respects. Besides, it was prophesied that the Messiah should be a king sitting on the throne of David, and commanding the kings of the earth. By which it is evident that his laws

must be of another nature than those of Moses, that were proper only to the church whilst confined to the Jewish pale, but not for the government of the world. And whereas the Jews object, that some of their rites were ordained to continue for ever; the answer is clear, that was only to distinguish them from some temporary injunctions, that were of force only while they were in the wilderness, or when they were inhabitants of Canaan, but were to be practised in all places, till, by a new signification of the divine will, they were forbidden. And it is observable, that in the Jewish law the term for ever, when applied either to a man's right, or to servitude, imports only a continuance to the jubilee: so that those rituals were to continue in their vigour during that entire period, and to be determined after the coming of the Messiah, the great jubilee of the world. And that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah is most evident, in that his coming was exactly as he was designed, and was to be expected; that he had the power of working miracles to authorise him to change the externals of their worship and service. Briefly, Judaism now is but the carcase of a dead religion, and the obstinate adherers to it, are become so sottishly blind, as to believe the most prodigious fables as divine revelations.

Since the coming of Jesus Christ, Mahometanism has overspread a great part of the barbarous world. But this carries in it such apparent and certain marks of falsehood, that it can be no temptation to any person in whom there is but a spark of good sense. Whether we consider,

(1.) The author from whom it was derived: a robber, one drenched in sensuality, and therefore utterly unqualified to be the revealer of the will of the holy God to men.

(2.) The quality of its doctrines: some are ridiculous and extravagant above the vanity of a feverish dream: some are pernicious, flattering both the lower appetites—the concupiscible, by losing its natural restraints from exorbitant fleshly pleasures—the irascible, by commending the violent oppression of others for the advancement of religion.

(3.) The means by which it had its rise and was propagated: it sprang from imposture; Mahomet erected an oracle in his own fancy, and pretended that the Holy Ghost descended there to give his inspirations. Thus he seduced at first: but having got a strong party, force succeeded deceit. The sword cut its way through many countries. And is it strange that the people so fiercely taught should follow the religion of the cruel conqueror? Thus it was planted, thus it increased, and is still maintained by the same causes.

(4.) The quality of those who received it. They were barbarous nations, and absolutely forbidden to make an inquiry into the matters of religion. And how easy is it to make an impression on the rude lump of the multitude? What wonder is it that pleasant follies should usurp the belief of the ignorant vulgar?

(5.) It promises in the future life a paradise, most unworthy the glorious rewarder, God, and the excellence of man. This is so evident, that Avicen, a Saracen philosopher, and Mahometan in profession,

speaks with abhorrence of those dreggy low delights, and, on the contrary, asserts, that the height of happiness is in the perfections of the soul united to God; and thus virtually condemns their faith, as repugnant to the dictates of clear religion.

CHAPTER II.

The Christian Religion considered.

I WILL now consider the Christian Religion directly in itself. It has this noble prerogative above the rest, that the more one searches into it, the more its divinity appears. Whereas other religions may please a superficial eye, but cannot endure a serious trial. Some things are to be premised.

1. I shall suppose it as a principle above all doubt, there was such a person as Jesus Christ, who conversed in the world, consigned the Christian doctrine to the apostles, and by them it is conveyed to us in the New Testament. For in asserting it, we have the uniform deposition of all that profess this religion, from its rise till the present age, in all parts of the world. Though of different opinions in other things, yet they agree in this, that Jesus Christ was their founder. Now, who can better know the Author of an institution, ecclesiastical or secular, than those who were admitted into its beginning, and those who have succeeded in that order from age to age, without interruption? Besides, we have the consenting and constant testimony of Jews and Heathens, the

obstinate opposers of the Christian religion, that its name as well as original was derived from Christ. We may with more reason suspect, there were never such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle, or that the books, which, from their times, by universal persevering fame, have been attributed to them, were made by others, and put forth under false titles, than to question what is so generally received concerning the author of the Gospel. It is the perfection of folly and madness to oppose such evidence.

2. It is equally certain, that the books of the New Testament are transmitted to us in their original purity, without any material alteration. For it is incredible that the societies of Christians should neglect the preserving uncorrupt and entire, those writings which they esteemed a most sacred treasure, on which they built their hopes of eternal blessedness. It cannot be supposed they would transmit them to their children, whose salvation must have been dearer to them than the world, otherwise than they received them. This were to charge them with the most supine carelessness, and unnatural cruelty. Besides, the great number of copies dispersed through all places, and translated into many languages, and read in all Christian assemblies, make the attempt to falsify them in things of moment to be morally impossible. This will be more clear, if we consider, that among Christians there have been so many persons wise and good, of excellent learning and virtue, and of divers countries, that by their office, were established the depositaries of those present writings. And is there any colourable pretence to imagine, that they should suffer any notable

alteration in them, much less conspire to make a change in any doctrines of faith or life therein delivered? To give reputation and credit to a lie, entitling it to divine revelation, especially in matters of eternal consequence, is such a black crime that none can be presumed capable of, but one that has utterly lost his conscience. I shall not here urge, that the immortal providence of God is eminently interested in preserving the Scriptures in sufficient purity. It were a vile imputation upon his wisdom and goodness, to believe that he would permit them to be undiscernibly corrupted in points important to his own glory, and man's salvation. Thus, a snare would be laid without possibility of prevention, and the embracing error instead of truth, would be innocent. But this argument, though incomparably the best, supposes that the Christian doctrine descended from heaven, the proofs of which are to be considered.

3. I will not insist on the proofs of all mysterious points of the Christian faith singly considered, but propound the arguments that evince the truth of that religion, wherein they are expressly and clearly contained, and from thence conclude that it is most reasonable to believe them. That divine revelation is infallible, is an acknowledged principle by all men: for, natural reason dictates that unerring wisdom and infinite goodness, are essential perfections of God; so that he cannot be deceived, nor deceive those that trust in his word.

4. The proofs of the truth of the Christian religion are of a moral nature; and though not of equal clearness with the testimonies of sense, or a mathematical demonstration, yet are so convincing, that

the considering dispassionate spirit fully acquiesces in them. But the motives of faith are such, that although the object be most certain, yet the evidence is not so clear and irresistible as that which flows from sense, or demonstration. And it is the excellent observation of Grotius, 'God has wisely appointed this way of persuading men of the truth of the Gospel, that faith might be accepted as an act of obedience from the reasonable creature.' For the arguments to induce belief, though of sufficient certainty, yet do not so constrain the mind to give its assent, but that there is prudence and choice in it. Not that the will can make a direct impression upon the mind, that it should comply with its desire, and see what it does not see. But the mind, enlightened by sufficient reasons that the Christian religion is from God, represents it so to the will, and the will, if sincere and unbiassed by carnal affections, commands the mind not to disguise the truth, to make it less credible, nor to palliate, with specious colours, the pretences of infidelity. And thus the belief of it results from conviction and love.

This moral evidence is as convincing as is requisite to make us steadfastly believe and obey the Gospel. Moral arguments produce as satisfying certainty, though not so palpable as those drawn from sense. When there is a concurrence of reasons proper to the nature of things, and the strongest they are capable of, by their united light they dispel all doubts and fear of the contrary. For, after the understanding has deliberately and impartially compared the motives and arguments in favour of the truth of a thing, and those that contradict it, and finds the

most weighty reasons in one scale for it, and in the other nothing but air and emptiness, it concludes, without hesitation or suspense, that such a thing is real.

II. To proceed: The *intrinsic excellencies* of the Christian religion will appear, by considering the doctrines, precepts, and promises it contains, which are the essential parts of religion. And of them in general we may observe,

1. *Its Doctrines.*—The Gospel illustrates and establishes all the natural principles of truth and goodness that are common to mankind, the rule of moral actions: and reveals all supernatural things requisite for the glory of God, and the supreme happiness of man, that rectified reason, upon the discovery, must acknowledge it came from heaven, and infallibly leads those who believe and obey it to heaven.

There is such an entire agreement between all the parts of the Christian religion for accomplishing its great end, as affords a clear conviction it is no human invention, but from God. As the harmonious composition, the beautiful order, and uniform preservation of the world, is a sensible demonstration that it proceeds from a most wise, powerful, and good cause.

In particular, the doctrine of the Gospel contains besides what may be known of God, and of man by natural light, two principal points: an account of the corruption and misery of mankind, in its first causes: and his redemption, effectually accomplished, by the Son of God. The discovery of both is equally necessary to man. The first makes him understand

the depth of his guiltiness, that he is incomparably more wretched than he feels himself, clears the purity and justice of God in his dealings with man, and prepares him by the afflicted sense of his condition for mercy. And the knowledge of the divine Redeemer, powerful to restore him, is as necessary in order to his duty and happiness. For without it, he would be always tormented with the mournful remembrance of his lost felicity, and hardened in despair.

The Christian religion gives a full account of the depravation and misery of human nature, in its first causes. The Heathens felt an inseparable permanent discord in man between the upper faculties and the lower appetites, but were utterly ignorant of the cause of it. Now, the Scripture reveals that man, in the original frame of his nature, was regular and holy; a piece of workmanship worthy the perfections of his Creator; but he abused his liberty to break the first command, which was given for the trial of his obedience. He yielded to the enticements of a fallen spirit, who was a liar, that he might be a murderer; and by his revolt from God lost his holiness, and made a forfeiture of all the privileges of his happy state. Thus, the fountain was tainted; and "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? By the offence of one, judgment came upon all to condemnation." Every man is now born a slave of sin, a tributary of death. From hence it follows, that the most deformed monsters in villany, the most fierce enemies of religion, serve to confirm its truth, as well as the most eminent saints. These show the virtue of redemption by the sanctity of their

lives, the other the corruption of nature by their obstinate wickedness.

The Christian religion instructs us that God sent his own Son into the world in the human nature, that he might offer up himself an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of men, to restore them to his favour. This is a mystery above the flight of any created understanding; yet it is so tempered and framed—there is such a uniformity of wisdom in all its parts—it presents such a full and glorious image of the Deity in all his perfections,—that it causes the highest admiration, and commands belief in those who duly consider it. The whole economy becomes the majesty, the goodness, the holiness, and justice of God. His supreme majesty appears in his pardoning the guilty for the sufferings of another. For this is an infallible proof that he is above law. And his inconceivable mercy is the only principle and fountain of our pardon. For man was absolutely incapable to merit the favour, or to repair the honour of God, so injured by his inexcusable disobedience. Repentance cannot produce such great effects. What merit can there be in the sorrowful sense and confession of that which deserves eternal death? Besides, an extreme hatred of sin, an ardent love of holiness, serious resolutions to follow it whatever it costs, (which is the best part of repentance,) was due to God before the commission of sin, therefore cannot be satisfaction; so that pure mercy is the cause of forgiveness. Moreover, God, to glorify his holiness, in declaring his vehement and irreconcilable hatred to sin, and to preserve the rights of justice, was pleased to appoint an all-sufficient Mediator, capable

to offer himself an expiatory sacrifice for sin, and to give an infinite value to it. This was done by the incarnation of the Son of God. The flesh and blood he took of our humanity, was made divine by union with him, and, offered on the cross, was full payment for our offences. Thus justice and mercy triumph with equal glory, being equally victorious. For what is more honourable to justice than satisfaction equal to the offence? And what can more commend mercy than the most free and undeserved bestowing of the high price requisite for it? Thus the Gospel affords to us a just and complete idea of the divine excellencies in the redemption of man. The design, manner, and the effect are most worthy of God. Where might such a contrivance of wisdom be framed but in the divine Mind? Where could such an excess of compassion be found but in the heart of God? Thus it became God, who is love, to magnify his love, to advance his dearest glory, and overcome our guilty disaffection to himself. For while terrible apprehensions of the Deity possess the heart, it is frozen with a stony rigour, which the hope of mercy only can dissolve. Thus it appears, that the "doctrine of the Gospel is worthy of all acceptation."

2. *Its Precepts.*—The Christian religion sets before us a rule of life, pure and perspicuous, in nothing superfluous or defective, but comprehending the entire duty of man: this was necessary in order to his recovery. For, in his fallen state, the law of nature is active in some things, but dormant in others. The best morals of the heathens are dashed with impure permission. "But the grace of God, that bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying

ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." It forbids all sin, in all its degrees, not only the consummation of it in the act, but the first conception of it in the thoughts and desires: which argues that the Lawgiver was more than a man, having an inspection into the heart, which is only visible to God, and only accountable to him. It teaches us to worship God, the supreme and purest spirit, with the highest esteem, and with purity of affections. It enjoins all relative duties to men in a most perfect manner. What things we would have others to do unto us, supposing ourselves in their circumstances, we are obliged to do to them. This one law of Christ, eminently contains all others that respect society. This is the primitive rule of commerce, and directs our carriage towards all persons with justice and equity, kindness and decency. The Gospel, also, with respect to ourselves, gives a perfect rule to make us holy and blessed. It teaches us the contempt of the world, the valuation of heaven, the restraint of corrupted sense, and the angelical exercise of our affections. In short, it commands the practice of all virtues, and that we should aspire to the most eminent degrees in them. But, especially, it enjoins humility and love to God, the foundation and perfection of all virtues, of which the precepts of philosophy take little notice. Humility, that is, a lively, deep sense, that nothing is properly ours but sin and misery, arises from the consideration of our absolute dependence upon God for our being, all the benefits we enjoy in nature or grace. From hence gratitude springs. It is most reasonable, that

our lives should be a continual expression of obedience, from a noble and free principle of love to God, and be designed for his honour, and that, for all our advantages, temporal and spiritual, we should only glory in him. In this, philosophers were very defective: they considered man with respect to himself, or to other creatures without him; and, accordingly, the product of their precepts, was a certain moral honesty, to do nothing unbecoming the reasonable nature, nor to break the civil peace. But they did not consider duly his relation to the Creator, in "whom he lives, moves, and has his being, from whom proceeds every good and perfect gift." And by neglecting him, all their glittering actions were but a weak counterfeit, a dead resemblance of real virtue. If God be not the principle, the motive, and the end of what we do, there are wanting the essential ingredients of moral goodness. Now, all these precepts shine with their native light, and carry such evidence of their rectitude, that our obedience may come from an ingenuous, filial spirit, satisfied with the reasonableness of our heavenly Father's commands, and not be servile, only performed to the absolute will of a master. And can there be a more convincing proof of the truth of the Christian religion, of its divine descent, than the image of God's holiness so clearly impressed upon it? And further, these precepts are delivered with that plainness, and so proportioned to the capacity of all, and yet with that sovereign authority, that it is reasonable to believe that God himself speaks, and it becomes man to hear with reverence and submission. The Gospel is without the ornaments of

art, yet its sweet facility is tempered with that majesty, that it is a sensible character that divine wisdom composed it.

3. *Its Promises.*—The promises of the Gospel are so worthy of God, and suitable to the wants and desires of men, that it is perfectly reasonable to assent to their truth and goodness. This will appear by a particular consideration of them.

The promise of pardon to penitent believers. And in this we are to consider the conditions, and the ground of its assurance to us. The conditions are, repentance and faith.

Repentance is a peculiar command and privilege of the Gospel. The law, considered in itself, did not admit of it, nor give the least hope of pardon: for it supposes man in the integrity of nature, and accordingly directs him how to please God and preserve his love, but propounds no means of reconciliation after an offence. There are no seeds of grace to temper its rigour. But the Gospel is the declaration of mercy to the guilty and miserable, upon such terms as God may be capable to give pardon, and man qualified to receive it. It is not more true that God is the judge of the world, and that all men shall appear before his tribunal, than that sin without repentance shall not escape punishment. To forgive the unreformed sinner would stain his purest perfections, the inviolable beauty of his holiness, the incorruptible rectitude of his justice. Such lenity would have a pernicious influence on the corrupt world, by encouraging men to sin without fear, and outrageously to break his laws in confidence of pardon. Therefore, in the evangelical promise, repen-

tance and remission of sins are inseparably joined. Repentance is a preparative in order to our receiving divine mercy, and a strong preservative against sin for time to come. The remembrance of those sorrows and fears, the anxieties and indignation against himself, that sin causes in a true penitent, will make him jealous, for the future, of his heart, and circumspect against all temptations that may betray him. Besides, the apprehension of just and eternal vengeance, makes the mercy of God so admirable, the sense of his tender compassion so sweet, that an humble believer cannot forget or neglect it. The forgiveness of sin in this way, is not only an engagement, but an infallible cause, of fearing to offend a God so great and good.

And faith is a qualification as requisite for the obtaining pardon; that is, a cordial, entire receiving Jesus Christ, as he is presented to us in the Gospel: to resign our minds to his doctrines as our prophet, to have reliance on his sacrifice and mediation as our priest; to yield universal, cheerful, and constant obedience to him as our king. And how congruous is it that all who receive so invaluable a benefit as forgiveness of sin, should thus honour him who procures it?

And the Gospel affords the strongest assurance that God is most willing to pardon humble and contrite sinners. This is necessary for the relief and ease of true penitents. For when the enlightened conscience reflects upon the number and enormity of its sins, and presumption in committing them, it is ready to be swallowed up with despair of recovering the lost favour of God. It cannot devise any means how to appease his incensed majesty, and satisfy

violated justice: how a rebel should become his son; how one condemned to everlasting punishment, should be restored to the unfading inheritance of life. The case is most intricate and hopeless. Now the gospel propounds means of universal sovereign efficacy to reconcile God and us; the most precious blood of his Son offered up a sacrifice to expiate sin. This sprinkles all nations, and in all ages retains an undecaying virtue. This affords solid and everlasting comfort to all sensible returning sinners.

The sending of the Holy Spirit of God to renew us according to his image, and to confirm us against temptations in this mortal life, is another promise of the Gospel, and most requisite to make us capable to serve and enjoy him. A happy temper of nature, the precepts of philosophy, virtuous examples, the severity of human laws, are not powerful enough to regenerate a man, and transform him into a new creature. They may restrain the exorbitances of carnal appetites, but cannot thoroughly change the mind and affections. Were there any vital spark within, any seed of holiness in man's corrupted nature, such assistance might cherish it; but he is dead to the truly spiritual life, though not to the merely moral; and no less than an omnipotent efficacy can produce a new spring of life, a divine nature, the principle of willing obedience to God. And after conversion, while in the state of trial here, the best are subject to innumerable surprises by their own frailty, and exposed to new dangers every hour, by temptations that foment and heighten the relics of sin in them, so that, without supernatural assistance, they would be quite discouraged and foiled by the enemies that

war against the soul. Now in the Gospel, God has promised to give "the Holy Spirit to those that ask it:" in the most hazardous and difficult conflicts, he assures those who ardently address themselves to him for help, "that his grace shall be sufficient for them."

The Gospel contains many gracious promises with respect to supplying the wants, and giving support and refreshment under the troubles, of the present life. Temporal blessings are in the lowest rank of good things, and are promised, as they should be desired, subordinately to our chief good. "First seek the kingdom of heaven, and the righteousness thereof, and all other things shall be added," saith our Saviour. And to relieve us in the troubles of this mortal state, the Gospel assures us of their blessed issue at the last. The main design of philosophy was to reconcile the mind to every condition; that nothing might be able to discompose its tranquillity. As some high mountains that ascend above the middle region, whilst clouds charged with thunder break upon the sides, and storms encompass it below, yet the top has a pure sun and calm air. Thus the philosophers pretended to raise man to that height of virtue, that the superior part, the mind, should be serene and undisturbed, whatever was done to his lower part, the body. But their principles were insufficient on which they built their persuasion. The Christian religion alone affords us solid and everlasting comfort. It does not disguise the nature of things, but allows "that present afflictions are not joyful but grievous." It doth not promise an exemption from misery: nay it foretells, that besides

the common troubles that fall upon mankind, there are some proper to sincere Christians, to which they are exposed on account of their holy profession. But "it assures them that all things shall work together for the good of those that love God." As in mixed bodies, the divine power is admirable, in tempering the qualities of the fighting elements in such a manner, that what in itself is a destructive contrariety, becomes only a diversity, to preserve the compounded beings that result from them. Thus the wise and gracious providence of God makes all things, even the most adverse, to conspire for the final happiness of his faithful servants. "Their light afflictions that are but for a moment, work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This makes them to "possess their souls in patience, to rejoice in hope," and to be triumphant conquerors over the greatest outward troubles. Who can dispute felicity with that person who is upon certain grounds persuaded "that nothing shall separate him from the love of God?" Nay, that the worst evils he suffers promotes his supreme happiness. For the afflictions that befal a Christian upon the account of religion, render him more dear to God: and those that are the effects of his sins, if humbly submitted to, and improved for holy ends, confirm his faith in the divine mercy. The Gospel is that paradise wherein the tree of life is, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

The Christian religion promises for the reward of obedience, a blessedness most becoming the glorious goodness of God to bestow, and the reasonable creature to desire; that is, the perfection and satis-

faction of his most noble faculties, in the clear vision and full enjoyment of God himself in a perfect eternal state. The heathens wretchedly mistook in their opinions about the last end of man. There is a secret instinct in the human nature towards a felicity suitable to the more excellent and divine part, but stifled under darkness and concupiscence, that is become a second nature. Reason is misled by sense after the fickle appearances, the deceitful vanishing colours of good. And this is a certain indication that man is fallen from the degree of his original perfection. For if it had never been corrupted, he should enjoy true and complete happiness: if he had been always corrupted, there would be no glimmering idea of a happiness above what this present world affords, no inclination towards it. This is the spring of his misery and sin, that the spiritual eternal good is undiscerned, unregarded, whilst he seeks for happiness in numberless vanities. The philosophers were full of glorious presumptions, and had the appearances of wisdom, but afforded no certain light to direct the mind, no heavenly motives to allure the will.

No sparks struck out of human intellects were sufficient to give light or heat, to direct in the clear way, and to animate against the intervening difficulties that hinder men in the pursuit of blessedness. This was the state of the Pagan world, till "light and immortality were brought to light through the gospel." The quality of this life is therein revealed; it is a pure and holy felicity, consisting in the perpetual exercise of the most excellent actions the intelligent nature is capable of:

that is, in the perfect knowledge, and love, and praises of God himself. The subject of it is the entire man, for this end the body shall be raised from its dead sleep to an eternal life. The place is the highest heavens, framed by the divine power for the seat of his majesty, the kingdom of his love, wherein he will manifest himself to his favourites. And can there be a stronger attractive, a more noble inducement to make us holy? Secular rewards, as riches, and honours, and the like, are extrinsical to the nature of goodness; and to do our duty with such low aims and expectations, is to be defective in the best part of it, the love of virtue for its inherent excellence. But the divine reward is the perfection of holiness, the glory of the soul; and the belief and regard of it has a powerful influence to make us truly good. The faith in this makes us victorious over all the charms and all the cruelties of the world. For what can possibly come into competition with a happiness infinite in its greatness and duration?

I will only add, that though heaven be so rich a jewel, that it needs no foil to set off its lustre, to those who are clear-sighted to behold it; yet in a merciful compassion to man, the Gospel reveals what will be the recompense of wilful continued disobedience, an eternal hell, wherein the justice and power of God are terribly glorified. And what is more powerful to excite the sensual and secure, who despise the blessed hope, than the fear of an immortal death?

Now, after this short delineation of the Christian religion, let reason judge whether it is the invention

of men. The doctrine of it shines with so clear an evidence, the precepts are so pure, able to inspire us with true holiness, the promises are so divine, that every one, who does not wilfully shut his eyes, or turn them to other things, may discern its original to be from above; that it comes from the Fountain of wisdom, holiness, and goodness. What are all the productions of the earth to this sacred present of heaven? If there be any shadow of virtue in other religions, here the reality is, in the highest perfection, and separate from all vicious mixtures. Christianity enjoins universal sincerity and purity of heart and life. It instructs man to appear what he is, by an humble acknowledgment of his sinful unworthiness, and to be what he appears, by an inward love and real practice of that religion of which he makes a public profession. It impresses a more noble character upon moral virtues, by enjoining them from a principle of love to God, and directing their performance to his glory, than philosophy did, that commanded them only as agreeable to human reason. What are all the most beautiful excitations of philosophy to the high motives of the Gospel? To apply ourselves to the writings of the wisest heathens, in order to our happiness, and to neglect the Scriptures, is to be guilty of worse folly than the barbarous Indians at Mexico, who, though their woods abounded with wax, the labour of the bees, yet only made use of brands, that afforded a little light with a great deal of smoke. Upon the most impartial inquiry, and exact search, reason will conclude, either that there is no blessed end for which man was designed by his Maker, or the Gospel only

has revealed it, and the effectual means to obtain it. So that we must say, with the zeal and affection of the apostles to Jesus Christ, " Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

CHAPTER III.

On the Evidence of Miracles.

We are next to consider those *external proofs* of the truth of Christianity, the works of God himself, that seal our full assurance of it. I shall instance in two; *miracles*, and the *accomplishment of prophecies.*

1. A miracle is a supernatural work, that requires an extraordinary divine power to effect it; for none can alter the universal laws of nature, prescribed from the beginning of things and time, but the Author of it. Indeed, we do not exactly know the compass of that circle wherein the spirits of darkness exercise their power. They may, by the application of natural means unknown to us, produce things that may astonish, or by lying wonders deceive men: but a true miracle is a work reserved to God, and possibly to no less than infinite power. Whether it be a first or second creation, the forming a new eye, or the giving a visive power to that that was naturally blind, it can only be done by his hand. If we respect Omnipotency, there is the same facility; if the thing done, there is the same difficulty in the performance. If the devils had such

a power, they might create a separate kingdom, and reign there.

Now, miraculous testimonies were given to confirm Christianity, that there might be a just correspondence between its doctrines and their proofs. The mysteries of the Gospel, in their existence, are above all natural power, and in their belief, above the natural understanding. All that nature can do or know, does not make them credible. Therefore, it was requisite those things that transcend the comprehension of human reason, should be confirmed by the divine power. Besides, as the mysteries of the Gospel are sublime, so the rewards are future; and that the Gentiles might not pretend that the preachers of the gospel feigned another world, and a heaven, and a hell, wherein the souls and bodies of men shall be glorified or tormented according to their actions in this life, supernatural evidence of the truth of those promises and threatenings was necessary. In short, herein the divine goodness appeared, that, as the true religion is necessary to the salvation of all men, so it was discernible by such signs as may convince all. For, upon the sight of those divine works, the simplest people were led, by the outward sense, to an inward firm faith in Jesus Christ.

These things being premised, I will take a brief view of the miracles wrought by our Saviour to give faith to his doctrine.

It is recorded of Moses, who was a type of Christ, that after his familiar converse with God, as a man with his friend, descending from the mount, his face shone with such an excessive brightness, as it were by reflection from the face of God, that, coming to

the Israelites to deliver to them the divine laws, he was fain to cover it with a veil: yet some rays of that miraculous splendour were visible through that mysterious veil, to assure them it was Moses himself that directed and governed them according to God's will.

Thus, when the Son of God came down from the heaven of heavens to instruct the world, he shadowed the light of the Deity with a veil of flesh; yet he was not so absolutely concealed under his humanity, but that from time to time some beams of the divine nature appeared in works so proper to God, that the Apostle says, "We saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten Son of God." In the representation of our Saviour's miracles by the evangelists, we may consider their number and variety, his manner of performing them, and the certainty of them.

(1.) Their number and variety. He went about all Galilee healing all manner of sicknesses and diseases, even the most incurable; the blind, the deaf, the lame, the paralytic, the leprous, the lunatic were cured. He raised the dead, and cast out devils. Besides, his miraculous feeding so many thousands, his commanding the enraged winds and seas to be still, and a great calm followed; his transfiguration before his disciples, when the beauty of heaven descended on his countenance, to be there more beautiful, discovered the sensible presence of the Deity in him.

(2.) The manner of his performing them is very important. They were done in an instant, by absolute dominion over nature. Thus, when he said to the leper, "I will, be thou clean;" immediately

his leprosy was cleansed. Thus, when the faithful centurion addressed himself to him,—" Only speak the word, and my servant shall be healed. He answered, Be it done unto thee as thou believest; and his servant was healed," &c. both expressions of command and empire. And his words to the blind man, " Receive thy sight," had the same creating efficacy with those, " Let there be light, and there was light." Thus with authority he commanded the unclean spirits, even the most furious and obstinate, and they were expelled from their mansions wherein they had revelled a long time. Thus, by the mere act of his will, he reversed the order of nature. When the widow's son was borne to the grave, he only said, " Young man, I say unto thee arise; and he that was dead sat up, and began to speak." Now, in this respect, the power of miracles in Jesus Christ was transcendent above that which either Moses, or the prophets, or the apostles had. It was derived to them by favour and commission from an extrinsic superior principle, the omnipotence of God; but it was inherent in his person, the natural proper attribute of his Deity, and proved him to be the Son of God, the Lord of nature, visible in human flesh. In all places this blessed virtue proceeded from him.

(3.) The certainty of his performing them was so great, that no shadow of suspicion could remain about it. Of this the numerous spectators were so convinced, that they said, " When Christ cometh," the expected Deliverer, " will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?" The Pharisees themselves could not deny the effects, but would not

acknowledge the true cause. Envy was more powerful in their breasts than the clearest evidence. Therefore, to invalidate his authority, they ascribed some of his wonderful works to the prince of devils. But this pretence was so void of all reason, and so full of impiety, that nothing but inveterate malice could suggest it. For, would the devil destroy his own kingdom? Is he such a lover of holiness as to accredit the most perfect master of it, by a compliance with his will? Those proud spirits are servile only in appearance, and when they suffer themselves to be commanded by men, it is always with design to establish and increase their own dominion. But our Saviour had a sovereign empire over them, and ejected them, not only from the bodies, but from the souls of men, subduing, by his holy doctrine, the power of sin, wherein the kingdom of Satan consists. From hence he argues, "If I by the finger of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come unto you." And hence it was, that he charges them with self-condemning obstinacy. For, if the Gentiles were inexcusable for not acknowledging and honouring God, so clearly manifested in the works of nature, the Jews were as inexcusable, for rejecting Jesus Christ, so powerfully declared to be the Son of God by supernatural operations.

Add further, that, in his lowest state, when he seemed to be utterly forsaken of God, yet then his innocency and the divinity of his person were miraculously testified; for at his death, even insensible nature, as if it had been capable of knowledge and affection, was in the most astonishing disorder, as

resenting the passion of its Lord. The sun was eclipsed, in a time and place against all possibility of nature. For the moon was then in opposition to it, and in its full, and in an instant passed a half circle of the heavens to interpose between the body of the sun and the earth, that the air at noon-day was darkened as at midnight. This compelled the Roman Centurion to acknowledge, that he "that suffered was the Son of God." And his resurrection from the grave, was a visible argument to confirm his doctrine; for that God would not exert his extraordinary power to confirm a false doctrine, in a matter of infinite moment, that so nearly concerns his own glory, and the salvation of men, there is sufficient assurance from his wisdom, truth, and goodness. Was there ever any prince that would permit a usurper, in his own presence, to make use of his royal seal, to authorise, by commission, his subjects to rebel against him? And would God have suffered a deceiver to work miracles, and thereby obtain divine honour from men, the incommunicable right of the Deity? Nay, it had not been a bare permission, but a positive act, of God himself, it being impossible that any other should do them. Or would God, who is the prime verity, work miracles to give credit to a lie, and violate the honour of his eternal, most perfect veracity? Or, is it consistent with his infinite goodness, to make a delusion so strong, that the most sincere would be in great danger to be overcome by it? Therefore, the Apostle urges it as an uncontrollable argument of our Saviour's divine mission: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among

you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." These were proofs of the greatest vigour, to induce the world to believe that he came from God, to make known his counsel for the recovery of lost undone mankind.

It is said by libertines, that the Heathens tell miraculous stories to confirm their religion. But this objection is easily refuted; for if Paganism had a miraculous power attending it, why did it not make use of it to discredit that power that authorised Christianity at the time it made fierce war against it? If equal to it in divine power, and incomparably superior in human aids, how came it to pass that the weaker proved victorious, and the stronger was put to flight? It is evident, therefore, the pretended miracles of Paganism were works of the devil, not to be compared with what was done by an Almighty hand.

If it be again objected, that the relation of the miracles, as performed by Jesus Christ, is from his disciples, who favoured his person and cause, and therefore may be justly suspected. I answer; the vanity of the pretence is apparent: for, if they had artificially framed a narrative of extraordinary things as done by him in that time wherein they wrote, and in the view of many, how easy had it been to expose them to the just scorn and hatred of all for their notorious falsehood, and infatuated impudence? But they were never accused of this. Nay, such was the number, clearness, and greatness of his miracles, that the uncontrolled fame of them forced his enemies, in after ages, to acknowledge their truth.

And his apostles, with their successors, in preaching the Gospel, wrought miracles so frequently, in the face of many nations, that those who were most obstinately averse from submitting to it, could not deny what was visible to thousands, and that miraculous power they always ascribed to the name of Christ. So that there is no colour for jealousy, as if his miracles, recorded in the Gospel, were not true.

But because the resurrection of Christ is the great principle upon which all Christian hopes depend, I will show, that we have all the rational assurance of it that it is capable of. This being a matter of fact done many ages past, is to be proved by testimony. And first, it is worthy of observation, that the providence of God is concerned to authorise this manner of proof, that is absolutely necessary for the preserving of human societies. It is of little importance, whether the truth of things be discovered in speculative sciences, or the appearance of it deceive the inquirer. It is no wrong to the commonwealth, that an astronomer mistakes in his dimensions of the magnitude of the sun; for his error does not lessen its benign influences; still it shines, and causes the spring and autumn. It is of little importance that a philosopher is deceived in his search after the principles of mixed bodies; for, notwithstanding his mistake, animals still live, and move, and perform all the functions suitable to their nature. But, in judgments that respect matters of fact, if the truth cannot be known by testimonies, the civil felicity cannot long subsist. For the unjust distribution of rewards and punishments is necessarily ruinous to the being of the state. And, is it credible the

divine Providence, that reaches to the smallest parts of the world in such an admirable manner, should leave the conduct of human affairs, even of the greatest moment, to a deceitful light? And that, after the most diligent search and caution has been used, the result should be only wavering conjectures? This imagination is extremely injurious to his wisdom and goodness.

In particular, if we consider the number and the quality of the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and the circumstances of their testimony, we shall have so clear conviction of its truth, as may induce us most firmly to believe it. I do not now speak of a divine faith, that supernatural light that makes us acquiesce in things because God has revealed them, but of a rational human faith, grounded on just and powerful motives, which is preparatory for the divine.

1. The law admits two witnesses as a competent number in causes of greatest moment. Of this, there were many. The approved integrity of a witness gives weight to his testimony: as, on the contrary, a known liar forfeits his credit so entirely, that he is not believed when he speaks true. Now, we have strong proof of the integrity of the apostles. If an inflexible fidelity and constant truth were qualities so remarkable in the community of the primitive Christians, that the Pagan judges themselves were constrained to acknowledge it, certainly they were found more eminently in those by whose doctrine and example they formed themselves. And as it is impossible to possess this virtue (so strictly united to justice,) in an excellent degree, without having

all the others; so it is evident they were adorned with all moral virtues. For their lives were above the least reproach and charge of their implacable enemies: so that they were fain to make express laws against their profession, to render them guilty in appearance. Besides, the circumstances of their testimony make it very valuable.

1. It was not built on the report of others. Mere hearsay is very deceitful, and often, like a contagion, passes from ear to ear, and blasts the reputation of the innocent with easy and credulous persons. But a testimony from sight, makes impression on the belief of wise considering men. Now, we have undoubted assurance of Christ's resurrection, from the clear and concurrent deposition of their senses: "What we heard, and what we have seen with our eyes, and what we have handled of the Word of life," saith the Apostle John.

2. The uniformity of their testimony renders it convincing. If any material contradiction be between witnesses, it is an infallible mark of their forgery. But the apostles agreed, not only in the substance, but in the particularity of the fact. In vain Porphyry and Julian racked their wits to find some contrariety in their relations. An impartial inquirer must acknowledge all their objections to be mere cavils, and effects of malice.

3. There were no motives to corrupt them. For the human will is naturally moved either by attraction of some good, or aversion from some evil. A fiction is not maintained for pure love of itself, but with respect to either of those objects, whether real or in appearance. But it is very evident, that no-

thing desirable in the world had the least influence upon the apostles. Nay, on the contrary, whatever was terrible to nature, discouraged them. They suffered all temporal evils, even death itself, for this testimony. And this last proof confirms all the others; they are called Martyrs, by way of excellency, who have sealed the truth with their blood. Now, what can be added to give us full and entire faith in their testimony? In great and difficult cases, suspected persons have been put to torture for the discovery of truth. The apostles were tried by the sharpest sufferings, yet declared the resurrection of their divine Master with unfainting perseverance. What shadow of doubt can remain, after such clear evidence of their sincerity? Let sober reason judge: whether the matter is capable of proof more strong and convincing? If it be said, they were deceived with an illusion, either being distempered or in a dream; both the pretences are most absurd and incredible. For the operations of the external senses may be infallibly discerned, by their proper characters, from those of the imaginations. Indeed, if the mind be in disorder, either from some more fixed and tenacious cause, or from sleep, the influences of reason are suspended, or only some faint rays appear, and are suddenly extinguished, so that it can make no true judgment of things. But sound reason can reflect upon itself, and extend its view to the operations of all the other faculties, and observe the just and certain difference between chimeras in the imagination, and things really existent. It considers, that the pageants of fancy, moving in a dream, vanish in a moment upon waking. But real effects, perceived by the senses in

their full exercise, are more constant and durable. One may be wounded in a dream, yet feel no loss of blood or strength when he is awake. Now to apply this to the present subject.

Is it in the least degree probable, that a vain shadow in a dream should make an indelible impression on the memories of the apostles, and their waking thoughts should not discover the deceit? Nay, that it should inspire them with invincible courage to assert that Christ was truly risen? Or who can, with the least colour of reason, accuse the apostles of simplicity or any disorder of mind, when such an equal, uniform, and strong light shines in all their writings? Besides, the constant order of their lives and actions, was a certain proof of the composedness and wisdom of their minds.

To sum up briefly, what is convincing, that the apostles were sincere and certain in their testimony. How could they be deceived when they saw him do miracles, or by his power did the like themselves? Did they all dream in a night, that they saw him appear after his resurrection? What could impress on them such a strong belief of that, of which the senses were the proper judges? Or, could they conspire to invent such a falsehood, and so easily to be convinced, with the least rational hope that the world should believe them? How was it likely, considering the variable humours of men, but that some of themselves, either by violent fears, or attractive hopes, should be prevailed on to discover the fiction, and leave their party? What could inspire them with such a false security, to despise the greatest dangers, and such a foolish presumption, to under-

take the greatest difficulties? How could they expect to induce the world to believe in, and worship, one ignominiously put to death? After such a convincing evidence, what can reason, nay, suspicion, object, with any colour, to weaken their testimony? The motives of credibility are so strong, that we may be as truly satisfied of the reality of the things related by the apostles, as if we had been spectators of them ourselves.

CHAPTER IV.

On the Evidence from Prophecy.

1. The accomplishment of prophecies concerning the Messiah, his coming into the world, the work he should do, his sufferings, and the consequences of them, afford undeniable proof that Jesus of Nazareth came from God for our salvation. Prescience of things to come, and independent on the settled course and order of natural causes, is an incommunicable prerogative of God. His eye only can pierce the thick veil of futurity. He has an open unconfined prospect of all things that were, are, and shall be. Such perfection of knowledge transcends angelical minds. It is more easy for the devil, by an adventurous imitation, to counterfeit miracles, than to give a clear and distinct prediction of things to come, that depend on free agents. From hence it was, that he gave responsals ambiguously, to conceal his ignorance of future events, and left those

who consulted his oracles, dubious and hovering in what sense to understand them. God alone could instruct the prophets to foretell things at such a distance, especially considering some of them are supernatural, and others contingent from the wavering of second causes. Now the several prophecies of Jesus Christ, if united together, make such an entire description of him, that they seem rather historical narratives of what is past, than predictions of what was to come. According to the prophecies, he was born of a virgin, a branch of the almost extinguished family of David, born in Bethlehem, ushered in by a forerunner, meek, lowly, just, and a worker of miracles. Therefore, when John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to inquire, whether he was the Messiah that should come, our Saviour gave no direct answer in words, but referred them to his works, that gave a full and real testimony concerning him, "Go tell John the things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them:" that comparing his miraculous operations for the recovery of human bodies, with the prophecies, there being a perfect agreement between them, and both undoubtedly from God, they might, by that clear and certain character, acknowledge him to be the promised Messiah. It is an observation of St. Austin, that the Son of God, foreseeing the perverse interpretations that his enemies would make use of to darken the lustre of his miracles, accusing him as a solemn magician that wrought by the force of enchantment, that such a false persuasion might not

prevail, sent the prophets before his coming into the world. From hence he argues, to repress those impious calumnies—if by magical arts he did such wonders as to conciliate divine honour to him, even since his death, was he a magician before he was born? And did he know the succession of all things in his life before he lived, that by an impossible miracle he predicted them to Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, and others? Having thus argued, St. Austin turns himself to those infidels, as Christ to the "Pharisees, looking round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts," and said, "O dead wretch, hear the prophets."

But above all, his death and passion (the substance of the Gospel) is most exquisitely drawn with the lines of his own blood. Daniel foretells the time, Dan. ix. 26. Zechariah, as if present at the execrable contract between Judas and the high-priests, tells us exactly the price of the treason, Zech. xi. 12. and then, as if transported to Calvary, he saw his side opened with the spear, and notes it in these words: "They shall look on him whom they have pierced." David, as if he stood at the foot of the cross in the hour of his suffering, relates the manner of them, in the person of our crucified Redeemer, Psalm xxii. "They pierced my hands and my feet:" then the disjointing of his parts by the torture, "I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me:" his hanging naked on the cross, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture:" the bitter draught they offered him, "They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink:" the blas-

phemous derision of the priests and people, the spectators of his death, " All that see me, laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him:" his words spoken in the height of his distress, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The prophet Isaiah represents the ignominy and torments of his passion, Isa. l. lii. liii. " I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting:" and by the eyes of his mind saw him crucified between two thieves, " He was numbered with transgressors:" and as present at his most affectionate dying prayer for his enemies, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;" observes, " that he made intercession for transgressors." Thus as several painters that would draw divers copies from the same excellent original, are intent to view its various aspects, some directly, some on this and the other side: so the prophets, as if they had been the spectators of his cruel sufferings, copied from the life, every one that part which the Holy Spirit assigned to them. Now, how was it possible, if not instructed by Omniscience, that being so distant in time and place, and so long before the accomplishment, they should concur in such an exact description of what should befal the Messiah? Men are not prophets by the light of reason: as nature is not subjected to their power to work miracles, neither is futurity open to their view, to compose a history of things to come. The death of Christ depended on several causes: men, devils, and God

himself concurred for divers ends in the same event. The two prime conspirators against his life, Lucifer and Caiaphas, were moved both from reasons of state to secure their own. The devil, to maintain his cruel empire, which for so many ages he had usurped in the world. For our Saviour having, with authority, cast out legions of his evil spirits from those who were miserably possessed by them, he was in fear of losing his power. Besides, he foresaw that if Christ were the Son of God, the killing of him would bring such a crimson guilt upon the Jews, that no less punishment than their rejection would follow; and so God should lose his peculiar people. Caiaphas excited the council to devote him as a sacrifice to preserve their nation from ruin; for their safety depending on their homage to the Romans, to prevent the jealousies that might arise by the fame of his mighty works, and by the people's attendance on him, that were fed by his miracles, they concluded on it as a necessary expedient, that Christ should die, and all suspicions be removed with him. Thus men and devils were the instruments, but God appointed that great event. The storm fell from heaven upon him for our sins. It is, therefore, expressly said, "he was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God;" who overruled the train of disorders, the work of their cruel malice, for contrary ends than were designed by them; for the devils were cast out of their kingdom, the Jews deprived of their liberty, and the kingdom of Christ established for ever. Now, who could read in the mind of God his free decrees? Even the angels of light, that always see his face, cannot, without a re-

velation of them. None " but the Spirit, that searches the deep things of God," could make the discovery? And who could foresee that the Messiah, so often promised to the Jews, so impatiently expected, and ardently desired, should be so fiercely rejected by them? That his death should be the effect of his own love, so of their hatred? None but God, to whom all the periods of time are equally present, and who is more intimate with the counsels and passions of men than their own souls are, could predict it. He communicated some rays of his prescience to holy men, who foretold that obscurest contingency. From hence it follows, that the clear testimonies of the prophets, exactly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, are an unanswerable demonstration, that he was the expected Deliverer to restore the world.

2. The universal and irreparable destruction of the state of the Jews, foretold as the just punishment of their rejecting the Messiah, is another illustrious proof of the divinity of his person and doctrine.

The first desolation by the Chaldeans, so compassionately recorded by Jeremiah, was not comparable, in the degrees and continuance, to this second by the Romans, of which Christ himself was the chief mourner, and made lamentation. Then they were transported together, and not to a very rigorous nor perpetual servitude in Babylon. After seventy years they recovered their liberty, and were restored to their native land. But in the last, the captives were dispersed among divers people; a sad prognostic that they should never be joined again in one society. The ruins of the nation were so

great, that the pieces of it are scattered all over the world. Wherever a Jew is found, there is a stone of ruined Jerusalem never to be rebuilt. In short, that wretched nation is rent into innumerable parts, and exposed to the contempt and hatred of all. As the body of a traitor is quartered, and the parts hung up in several places of public view, to signify the horror of his crimes in the severity of his punishment, God has taken away all the marks of his alliance with them. No distinction of their tribes remain, no observance of their legal ceremonies, no priests, no altars, no sacrifices, no prophets nor miracles; in short, there is no true worship among them, no God but an angry God, revenging their bloody impieties. And which is most worthy of consideration, the Romans that conquered them have lost their empire, and the nations which were subdued by their arms, have recovered their liberty; but the Jews, after sixteen hundred years, are still miserable. Now, is not this judgment of God upon them, a dreadful proof of the extremity of their wickedness in crucifying Jesus Christ, and that consequently he was, as he declared himself to be, the Son of God, and that his office and doctrine were from heaven. Never before did the wrath of God break forth in such a fierce manner against a sinful nation. Therefore it is represented under the image of the final doom, when justice, armed with flames, "shall devour the ungodly," and the whole world become a theatre of terrors. And never was any other nation guilty of such provocation; for the Son of God descended but once among men to be personally crucified. The singularity of the punishment is a

visible instructive sign of their transcendent crime. Immediately upon their pronouncing the capital sentence against him on earth, their utter ruin was pronounced in heaven. And the execution of the sentence was deferred no longer, but till the elect of that people were brought in, and by the preaching and excellent miracles of the apostles, the resurrection of Christ, and the truth of the Gospel were confirmed, and thereby a beginning and form given to the new Christian church. Now they have written on their foreheads, in very legible characters, the fatal curse which their fathers pronounced concerning Jesus Christ, "His blood be on us, and our children." When Moses, with indignation for their idolatry, broke the tables of the law, God re-established them, but when, for a greater guilt, God himself broke them, there is no possible redintegration.

If it be said, That it is not necessary to attribute this ruin of the Jews to the particular vengeance of God, but only to the instability of human things, wherein such disastrous revolutions sometimes happen.

I answer, that although divine justice was so visible in their astonishing destruction, that Titus himself refused a triumphal crown after his complete victory, declaring that he was but the instrument of God's anger, who was the invisible emperor in that bloody expedition; yet, to force an acknowledgment of it from all that are not wilfully blind, it was foretold when the Jews were in peace; and their killing the Messiah is specified, as the meritorious cause wherein that terrible effect was included: thus our

Saviour, in the parable of the husbandman and vineyard, after they had put to death the master's son, he adds, "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and give the vineyard to others." And upon his drawing near to the city of "Jerusalem, he wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." This was also foretold by Moses, in all the terrible circumstances: "The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young: and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land; and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord

thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee," Deut. xxviii. Such was the threatening, and the event was correspondent in all the degrees of misery. Which, as it demonstrates the truth of the prophecy, so it may instruct us how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God.

3. The converting of the Gentile world to the saving knowledge of God, by the Messiah, was foretold in the Scriptures. The beams of this glorious truth were gradually dispensed to the Israelites, as their weak understandings could sustain it. When the covenant was made with Abraham, God declared, in express terms, " In thy seed shall all the nations of the world be blessed." That seed was the Messiah, not the people of the Jews descending from Abraham; for they were so far from a universal blessing to the world, that, on the contrary, they vainly presumed that God, for their sakes, despised the rest of mankind. And, indeed, before the coming of Christ, they were an enclosed garden, the peculiar people of God; and without the compass of Judea, sin reigned absolutely and universally. Now, that promise clearly signifies, that the favour and blessing of God that he conferred upon Abraham, in making known to him his will, and promising to be his God, and of his posterity, should one day be extended to all nations, by calling them to his knowledge and service. To this agrees the prophecy of Jacob: " The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet, till Shiloh come, and to him shall the gathering of the people be," Gen. xlix. 10. that is, the Gentiles shall be

converted from their idols to the true God, by the Messiah, whom the Jews acknowledge to be signified by that title. And Moses introduces God as complaining of the idolatry and ingratitude of the Jews, and declaring, "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; and I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation," Deut. xxxii. 21. The external covenant between God and his people is represented by the union of marriage, to signify the duty they owe to God, the highest honour, the most ardent affections, and the benefits they receive from him. Therefore, when the Jews gave divine adoration, the highest respects of religion, to idols, they provoked God to jealousy; and he threatens he would break his alliance with them, and give his heart and love to those which were not a people; and by the law of counter-passion, they should be provoked to jealousy. It is very visible these expressions signify the calling of the Gentiles. And David, by the same inspiration, in many Psalms, celebrates the kingdom of the Messiah. In Psalm xxii. he is introduced, speaking, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation—all the ends of the world shall remember, and turn unto the Lord—all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee." And in the lxvii. Psalm, "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee." The prophet Isaiah,

in his revelations, clearly speaks of the great design of God to bring the Gentiles to his service. Thus, in the second chapter, it is prophesied: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it: and many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And among all the rest, none is more clear and express than what is recorded in Isa. xlix. There first the Messiah is represented as declaring his commission from God to go to the people of Israel: "The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name, and he said unto me, Thou art my servant in whom I will be glorified." And afterwards complains of the obstinacy of the ungrateful synagogue: "Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." And immediately after it is added, "And now, saith the Lord that formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob again to him, Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that

thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." This oracle is precise and full; for it speaks of the nations, in opposition to the tribes of Israel, and directly foretells that the Jews would neglect the instructions of the Messiah, and that, upon their infidelity, God would, by the Messiah, give saving knowledge to all nations. And in the same sense he speaks in the liv. chapter: "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord." Who is the desolate and barren, but the Gentiles without God in the world, whilst the Jews were honoured and blessed in the mystical marriage with him? And who are the children of the forsaken, that should be far more numerous than those of the married, but the believers of the Christian church, in opposition to the Jewish church? And the other succeeding prophets concur in this prediction. Malachi, the last, speaks of it in such express terms, as are capable to convince any that does not wilfully renounce the use of his eyes and understanding. After God is introduced rejecting the Jews and their temple service: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hands." He adds, to signify the calling of a new church, for "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts." Thus

that great wonder was clearly foretold by the prophets, and as a work to be performed by the glorious power of God. And accordingly it is accomplished. For who, but God, could have inspired the apostles to undertake an enterprise so contrary to human prudence, being equally dangerous and impossible? And who else could have made it successful beyond all imagination? When the pride of Pharaoh was humbled, and his strength broken by the most despicable creatures, even the magicians were compelled to acknowledge it to be the finger of God: but his arm was revealed, when the spiritual Pharaoh, with all his powers of darkness, were overcome by such weak instruments. What furious winds from all parts of the world, conspired to extinguish the first springing light of the Gospel! The heathen emperors destroyed innumerable persons, presuming to drown the memory of Christ in the blood of the Christians. But such were the faith and love of believers of all conditions to their crucified Redeemer, that with the same joy they ran to suffer the most terrible punishments, as if they had been to receive crowns. In vain the strongest combinations were made against the truth. For the knowledge of the only true God, and his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, overcame impiety, with all its idols, and ignorance, with all its numerous masters. What is become of all the heathen deities, so honoured, so feared, so obstinately defended? Where are their altars, their statutes, their sacrilegious priests and sacrifices? They are buried in the ruins of their own temples, in the darkness of eternal oblivion. Where are all the sects of philosophers,

the Platonists, the Peripatetics, the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the rest, that filled Greece with their fame, and so many volumes with their fancies and errors? Like a torrent that rolls down with great noise from the top of a mountain, so, for a time, the speculations of their lofty minds poured along in a flood of swelling frothy eloquence; but now (and for how many ages since!) the very channel is dried up wherein they ran, so that scarcely any visible ruins remain in Athens itself of the schools where they taught. The greatest among them, Plato, adorned with the title of Divine, could never see his commonwealth, framed by him with so much study, established in one city. Whereas, if we consider the Gospel of Christ, it is hard to determine whether the doctrine be more simple, or the apostles, the first masters of it, to outward appearance; yet, without learning or human strength, in a short space they triumphed over the eloquence of the Greeks, the power of the Romans, the rage of barbarous nations. They abrogated laws, changed customs, and renewed the face of the world. In this the prophetic parable was fulfilled, "The kingdom of heaven," that is, the dispensation of the Gospel, "is like to a grain of mustard-seed;" one of the smallest grains, but of that spirit and quality that it suddenly springs up and spreads abroad.

This happy and stupendous success of the disciples of Jesus Christ, considered in itself, is an unanswerable proof that the Christian religion came from heaven. For it was only possible to the divine power. It is no wonder the religion of Mahomet extended and established its conquests in many coun-

tries: for that seducer persuaded the barbarous people by force of arms, they must be his disciples or slaves. And can the mind form a clear judgment, or the will make a free choice, when under a tyrannical necessity of compliance, or losing all the comforts of life? Can violence and cruelty produce a rational faith? That may force them to a counterfeit compliance, but cannot make men sincerely believe; it is apt to breed form without, and atheism within. Now, that a persecuted religion should live and flourish in the midst of flames, is as truly admirable, as if a little stream should pass through an arm of the ocean, retaining its freshness and purity in the midst of salt and turbid waters. That when the minds of men were prepossessed with inveterate opinions, contrary to its supernatural mysteries, and their wills overruled by carnal affections, utterly averse to its holy precepts, the world was captivated to the belief and obedience of it, is the most noble effect of Omnipotence. For other miracles, though above the laws of nature, yet were on the lower order of creatures without life and sense; but this internal miracle was wrought on the minds and hearts of men. To raise the dead, to calm a storm, to suspend the force of fire, to change waters into blood, is not so glorious a work as the converting rebellious souls to God, and making them a willing people to his holy laws. And if we further consider the prophecies so many ages before, concerning it, and observe the harmony betwixt the works and word of God, there results a demonstration as clear and strong as is possible. The prediction and accomplishment are equally divine. The success jus-

tifies the truth of the prophecy, and the truth of the prophecy justifies the divinity of the Christian religion. For by the apostles, and their successors, the heathens were turned from idols, to the service of one God, the Creator of the world: which was foretold by the prophets, not only as a thing that should arrive, but to be performed by the power of God. To ascribe, then, this glorious work to human artifice, as if his providence had been prevented by others, from doing that which he promised should be done by his own power, is so directly contrary to his wisdom and his truth, that common reason abhors the thoughts of it. Therefore, the Christian religion is divine, having God for its Author. Thus the truth of the Gospel is victorious over the Jewish, or the profane infidel.

It may be argued against the Jews, that their God foretold his Messiah should convert the nations. No other but one authorised from above could do it. Jesus Christ has done it, therefore he is the Messiah. And, consequently, they are either blind with prejudice, or maliciously deny the known truth. To profane infidels, it may be urged, none but the divine providence could foretell so great and marvellous a change of the world, none but the divine power could effect it, therefore it was the true God that made the prediction and event so exactly to correspond in all things.

Add further, that by comparing the prophecies of Christ and his kingdom with their accomplishment, the two sorts of enemies against the Gospel are made useful to convince one another. The Pagans by the Jews, that these things were fore-

told; the Jews by the Pagans, that these things were fulfilled. St. Austin relates, that the heathens, seeing the exact agreement between the prophecies in the Old Testament, so clear in words, and their accomplishment in the New, so clear in the effects, had nothing to reply, but that they were written after the things were done, and feigned to be predictions of ancient date. In answer to this pretence, he breaks out with wonder and joy, The cause is gained! and the victory of truth could not be more glorious. For, whereas the many nations in Europe, Asia, Africa, subdued by the arms of the Romans, were compelled to observe the rites of their religion, the Jews only were permitted to enjoy their sacred books, and their own worship, and were dispersed into all countries. And thus, by the admirable counsel of God, they give credit to the Gospel among the Gentiles. For if we consider the reverence they bore to the writings of the Prophets, that, with the greatest care, they have preserved them as the most precious inheritance left by their fathers, and their mortal hatred of Jesus Christ and his Gospel, that willingly they would spend their blood to deface the memorials of it, it is an invincible argument that the predictions concerning the state of the Christian church, recorded in their Scriptures, are sincerely delivered, and of divine authority. This their malice is an advantage to the faith of the Gospel, and by constraint they are the great confirmers of it. This is sufficient to reduce the heathens to silence and confusion. And the Pagan being convinced by the books of the Jews, the Jew may be convinced by the testimony of

the Pagans: for if the records so jealously kept by that nation were from divine inspiration, if they contain ancient prophecies, which the heathens see verified in the Gospel and the Christian church, why do not the Jews acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the promised Messiah? If the veil were not taken from Moses' face, and laid on their hearts, they must clearly see that the "light of the Gentiles is the glory of Israel." It is equally unreasonable to doubt, with the Atheist, that the Messiah was ever promised, or to believe with the Jews, he is yet to come.

CHAPTER V.

Proofs of Christianity from the New Testament. The Gospel so proved, deserves our firmest assent and adherence to its Doctrines.

THE sum of all that has been said, is comprised in the testimony that St. John produces to prove that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Redeemer of the world." This I will briefly open: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood, and these three agree in one." All the Divinity gave testimony of this important truth. The Father, not only by the miracles wrought by his power to confirm the mission of Christ, but (which is here

principally intended,) by a voice from heaven: first at his baptism, "This is my well-beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And at his transfiguration before some of his disciples, a shining cloud, the sign of the divine presence, encompassed them, and a voice came forth of the cloud, "This is my well-beloved Son, hear ye him." Upon this glorious voice, they were struck with such an impression of fear, that they fell on their faces. And when our Saviour, near his passion, prayed, "Father, glorify thy name; a voice came from heaven, I have glorified it, and will glorify it." Now, can there remain any doubt, after such a high attestation from the most Sovereign authority?

The Son also, besides the perfect holiness of his life, the exquisite wisdom of his doctrine, the wonders of his works, his resurrection from the dead, that were authentic proofs of his celestial person and calling, after his ascension gloriously appeared from heaven, in divers visions, to the preachers of his Gospel. To Saul, in his journey to Damascus, calling to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." This is an unexceptionable testimony that he is the Son of God, being risen from the dead, and returned to heaven from whence he thus discovered himself. Now, that this was real, and no fantastic illusion, is evident by the marvellous effects of it. Those who were companions in the journey were seized with great terror, and himself struck blind by the overpowering splendour of the apparition. But especially the effects of it upon his soul are convincing, who it was that spake to him. For Saul was by sect a

Pharisee, that of all others most passionately adhered to the Jewish religion; by temper, hot and violent; by profession, a persecutor of the Christians. One that breathed forth threatening and slaughter, that excited the fury of the high-priests, solicited their cruelty. In short, a fierce spirit that envied Nero the title of the first persecutor of the church. Yet this man, by this vision and voice from heaven, from a furious persecutor, in an instant became a zealous apostle; from a wolf, became a pastor. He presently expressed his entire submission, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" There is nothing so hard to do, nothing so dreadful to suffer, but I will readily undertake for thine honour, and the propagating of thy truth. Now, from whence came this change, so strange, so new, in a person confirmed in the opposite party? From whence this resignation of will, so entire and perfect, so unexpected and sudden? What gave him courage to contradict to their faces the high-priests, whose instrument he was, and declare that Jesus, whom they called a deceiver, was the Son of God, and their judge? What animated him to appear before kings and emperors, to testify this dangerous truth? What made him with unparalleled activity, with the most ardent affections, propagate the Gospel; and, after a thousand perils by sea and land, a thousand disgraces and injuries, at last to confirm the faith of Christ with his blood? It is, therefore, past all contradiction, that he had the greatest assurance that the Son of God spake to him.

Another vision of the Word from heaven was to St. John, when he was pleased to reveal to him the future state of his church, its combats and victories:

he then appeared in a form expressive of his majesty, power, and providence, requisite for the ordering all the great events that should befal it: and said, "I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I live for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death:" wherein he appropriates to himself the incommunicable titles of the Deity; and then declares those two astonishing miracles, that the Prince of Life, who had an eternal principle of it in himself, was dead; and that one who had been dead, was alive. This riddle the Gospel unfolds; the Son of God was made man, and by that admirable union allied eternity and time, life and death together. As it is a common form of speech, that a man dies when the body is deprived of life, though the soul be immortal; so it was true, the Son of God died when his body was crucified, though he was incapable of the least diminution of his divine life. And after three days he rose by the divine power to enjoy an immortal life; "and have the keys of hell, and death." The irresistible force of death all men must yield to, and from the grave there is no redemption by finite power. But Jesus Christ has sovereign authority and power to open the grave, and raise the dead to a happy immortality. This glorious appearance made St. John to fall as dead at his feet, and could not recover himself, till assured by the reviving words of his favour.

The Spirit also appeared from heaven to give testimony concerning the divine person and office of Christ: first, by descending as a dove on him when he was baptized. This was the completion of the

prophecy: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, to publish deliverance to the captives." And in the second of the Acts, the Spirit descended in the form of fiery tongues upon the apostles, to qualify them for preaching the Gospel to the world: and it is worthy of observation, that the apostles were before this very defective in wisdom and courage, so that their divine Master, though goodness itself, yet taxed them for their stupidity, and in his sufferings they all forsook him. But after the effusion of the Spirit upon them, they were endued with that admirable wisdom and resolution, that nothing could gainsay and overcome. They presently spake in various languages the things concerning Jesus Christ, that the world was astonished, and many converted by this testimony from God, for the honour of our Saviour, and others confounded in their obstinacy. Now, since this miraculous descent of the Spirit was to ratify the promise that he made to them, "If I go away, I will send to you another Comforter:" what more clear and valuable testimony can we have that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world? If infidelity should reply, if we had heard these voices, and seen those glorious visions, we should be convinced; but what assurance have we there is no deceit in these relations? I answer, there never was clearer ground of the belief of any thing done without the compass of our own senses, than of what the apostles testify, as hath been evidently proved before. And certainly as those who saw and heard those things, were by the divine characters in the external objects, and by their efficacy on their spirits, fully persuaded

they were not deceived; so we have as strong proofs that they did not deceive us in their reports.

I shall briefly consider the other testimonies. "And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood; and these three agree in one." The Spirit is to be considered in two different manners in the testimonies attributed to him, either in respect of those representations by a dove and fiery tongues, or in respect of his virtues and influences communicated to the Christian church: the first was his testimony from heaven; the second his testimony on earth. And these were his extraordinary gifts, so liberally dispensed at the first preaching of the Gospel: "To one was given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, to another faith;" that is, extraordinary confidence in the divine power, for the producing miraculous effects; "to another, the gift of healing; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues." Now, because these operations more eminently declare the presence and power of the Spirit than his ordinary graces, they are called by that name. For understanding the second witness, the water, two things are observable.

1. That in the rituals of Moses, frequent washings were enjoined, for the purifying of the Jews from legal pollutions contracted by them. And as those corporeal stains were resemblances of the vicious habits of the mind; so the cleansing by water was typical of sanctifying grace, that purifies the heart. And for this reason, under the new covenant, to re-

present the sanctification of Christians by an outward sign, baptism in water was appointed.

2. The Apostle John, in the narrative of the sufferings of Christ, tells us that a soldier pierced his side with a spear, so that "blood and water came out." This is not recited by St. John merely as a circumstance of the history, or as a certain proof of his death, but the following words, "He that saw this, testifies it, and his testimony is worthy of belief; and he knows that he says true, that you may believe," declare it to be of singular consequence. And, accordingly he says, "that our Saviour came by water and blood," with respect to that which was done at his crucifixion, which was so ordered by divine wisdom for high ends: that is, the water issuing out of his side, was a fit emblem of that sanctifying grace that is given to all that have communion with him in his death.

3. For the testimony of the blood, it is also to be observed, that by the Mosaic institution, daily sacrifices were offered up; and a most solemn one, by the high-priest in the day of atonement, to expiate the guilt of ceremonial uncleanness, and to restore those who, for that, were excluded from external communion with God in the sanctuary. Now, as that legal guilt arising from those outward pollutions, and the separation of those who were so polluted, from the service of God, was a representation of the moral guilt and punishment that follows the vicious habits and actions of men; so the shedding of the blood of the sacrifice and offering, was typical of the true propitiation that was to be made by the blood of Christ. And this is peculiarly remarked by the

Apostle, that "Jesus came not only by water, but by water and blood; and it is the Spirit that testifies of it, and the Spirit is the truth." By which we must understand something distinct from the former, that is, that the flowing of his blood signified the reconciling efficacy of his death, by satisfying divine justice, and, consequently, the remission of sins given to those who believe in him. Now briefly, to show the force of their conspiring testimony, that Jesus is the Son of God and our Redeemer, these things may be considered absolutely in themselves, or as the accomplishment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. In the last respect, they afford us a great assurance of this truth. For all was expressly foretold: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and handmaidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophecy." This promise was universally acknowledged to refer to the coming of the Messiah. For that of water, (that is, sanctification) not only the washings under the law were figures of it, but it was also clearly prophesied of in many places, and most expressly in Ezekiel, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes." And for the third testimony, besides that the typical blood of the Messiah ran down from all the sacrifices, it

was also foretold expressly by Isaiah what his sufferings should be, and the benefits accruing from them.

Now, if we compare the oracle with the event, who can justly doubt that the Messiah is come? But if we consider the things themselves, they afford an uncontrollable testimony of Christ's divine mission. Compare the primitive church, either with the Jews or the Gentiles, and see the difference between them. The Spirit, that was communicated but as it were in a few drops to the Jews, after the ascension of Christ, fell in a main shower upon the Christian church, enriching them with supernatural gifts: some favoured with revelations of sublime truths, above the discovery of the human understanding; some foretelling things to come, that were beyond the discovery of the most sharp-sighted reason; some speaking divers languages, wherein they had never been instructed; some having such an extraordinary faith in the divine power and goodness, that innumerable miracles were done by them in the name of Christ. If we look into the state of the Gentiles, how thick and prodigious was the darkness that overspread that chaos of impiety! In the Roman empire, that comprised the flower of wit and learning, what foolish and extravagant opinions of the Deity were commonly received! What idolatries, what impurities, what abominations were freely practised! But by the preaching of the Gospel, how clearly were the minds of men instructed in the true knowledge of God! And what a change was made in their lives! The world, that was as a barren desert, was suddenly changed into a paradise, fruitful in all good

works. Innocence, humility, purity, justice, charity, love to God, resignation to his will, were eminently visible in all nations, and all sorts of persons that were converted to the faith of Christ. Now, who caused such a marvellous and holy revolution in the world but God? What less than a divine power could raise men above sense, and make them victorious over the lusts of corrupt nature, fortified by custom, a second nature? Is it conceivable, supposing the doctrine of Christ were not from heaven, that it should produce such admirable effects? And is it conceivable that God would adorn, with all his graces, the image of his own excellency, his most precious benefits, those who did not honour him according to his will? Can there be found such astonishing contrarieties joined together, as the most impious error and depravation of the mind, with the greatest purity and rectitude of the will and affections? For if Jesus Christ were not the Son of God, those who worshipped him were in a mortal delusion.

The third testimony the Apostle produces, is the blood: that is, peace with God and conscience, the blessed fruit of justification by faith in the blood of Christ. The heathen world was in a dark state of fears, or slept securely in the shadow of death. Some were in a hectic trembling, continually haunted with the apparition of their sins, as so many infernal furies: others, though guilty of most fearful crimes, were secure from stupid atheism: others were quiet, from a presumption cherished by opinions unworthy of God, as if he would neglect his own glory to show mercy to them. Now the Gospel, to conquer the fears of sensible afflicted sinners, and to establish a

lively hope in God's mercy, reveals that the Son of God became man, and offered up his life and blood to divine justice, as an expiatory sacrifice for the sins of men. This reconciled God, whose honour was abundantly secured by that satisfaction. This appeased all the unquiet agitations of the spirits of believers, and produced the "peace that passes understanding," a joy unspeakable and glorious. This delivered them from the fear of death, under which the world was so long in bondage. And it is worthy observing, that no principles of nature ever produced such a generous contempt of death, as the Christian religion did in the professors of it. The Alexanders, Scipios, and Cesars, had trembled at the sight of those savage beasts that were let loose upon the martyrs, at the preparations of cruelty to torment them. Whereas, they regarded them with tranquillity, nay, with joy, as the matter of their triumph. This was true valour indeed, for the confession of the most important truth, and superior to the courage of those who were called the most renowned soldiers. For in a battle, by martial sounds, by violent motions, the spirits are fired, and men scarce feel their wounds, and are inconsiderate of their danger. But the martyrs had nothing to heighten their courage, but in cool blood, deliberately and without alteration, encountered that terrible enemy. Besides, soldiers in the sharpest conflicts have some hopes of victory. But the more than heroic constancy of the martyrs contemned death in its nearest approaches, and most fearful pomp.

Now this unshaken resolution in Christians encountering the last enemy, was from the lively sense

of God's favour, reconciled by the most pure and precious blood of his Son, and the hopes of everlasting happiness in his presence.

To conclude this argument, it is to be observed, that there is no proof more proper that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of the world, than the joint testimony of the spirit, water, and blood; for whereas sin was the only cause of our ruin, the office of our Saviour is to repair that ruin, and consequently, he that effectually does it, is to be acknowledged, believed, and embraced as our Saviour. Now the worst effects of sin are the ignorance of the mind, the depravation of the affections, and the terrors of conscience from the apprehensions of vengeance. Therefore, since the Gospel of Christ has brought celestial light, purity, and peace into the world, it is an infallible proof that he is the Redeemer of it. The sun, that visits the world with its refreshing beams, has no clearer marks of the divine wisdom in making it, and ordering its motions, than the spiritual light of the Gospel, that irradiates the minds of men, which were before in deep darkness. The riches of the earth in variety of fruits, is not a more convincing argument of the divine goodness, than to see the souls of men, that before were as dead earth, under the curse of heaven, to abound in all the fruits of righteousness. The separating the sea from the land, and setting bounds to its impetuous waves, is not a greater effect of God's power, than the calming the tempests of an unquiet conscience, and establishing tranquillity in it. And these blessings we entirely owe to Jesus Christ, in whose name they are obtained, by whose spirit they are conferred, and for whose glory they are designed.

Now, what more is requisite to afford us satisfaction that JESUS CHRIST came from God, and revealed his will in order to our happiness? Can it be reasonably expected that new miracles should be wrought to satisfy every sceptic that is still unsatisfied? Indeed the fountain of them is not dried up, the power of God is not weakened, nor his mercy lessened, but in extraordinary cases, when the Gospel is first preached to a nation, it may be expected, that, to convert them from Gentilism to the Christian faith, he will make himself known not only by word, but by power, in supernatural operations. But the vein of miracles is not still current in the church, there being sufficient motives of belief for the conviction of all that are not obstinate, without the performing of new ones. Must the Son of God present himself to all men in a visible glory? Or must his divine Father give another majestic testimony from heaven concerning him? If we have not such sensible evidence, we have as sure: the accomplishment of scripture prophecies is a permanent miracle, a more certain proof to us than that oracular revelation. For God spake but once in that voice, but he speaks by the prophets to the end of time. That was more astonishing, but less instructive to us than prophecies, that are continually unfolded and verified by events.

Before I finish this argument, I will briefly consider what is objected against some doctrines of the Gospel, namely, the Trinity, the divine incarnation, the mean state and sufferings of the Son of God in the world. These points have been opposed by the Jews, and other infidels, as mere impossibilities, directly contrary to the reason of mankind.

To this I answer; we must distinguish between what is incomprehensible to human reason, and what is repugnant to it; between the things which reason cannot perfectly understand how they can be, and the things which it perfectly understands that they cannot be. Natural light may not be able to discover the being of some things, and the manner of their existence, which really are. But what it sees to involve a contradiction, is absolutely impossible. Now, there is no point in the whole complexion of the Christian faith that is repugnant to reason. The unity and supreme equality of the three persons in the Godhead transcends our conception, but reason cannot prove it to be impossible. For the essence of God is not of the same condition with created substances; so that, although in the whole compass of the creatures there is no like instance, but one nature is always joined with one subsistence, yet it does not follow that the divine nature may not subsist in three persons. All the difficulty that is pretended to be invincible is this; that the manner of it is incomprehensible. And it is necessarily so; for it is impossible that what is infinite should be comprehended by a finite mind.

The incarnation of the Son of God, wherein the essence of Christianity consists, is not contrary to reason. Indeed it is impossible that the divine nature should be substantially changed into the human nature, and God cease to be God in becoming man, but the union of the Deity to the human nature is not impossible. For what repugnance is there, either in respect of God or the creature? Is it impossible that the supreme goodness should communicate it-

self in the strictest degree of union to the reasonable creature, or is the reasonable creature incapable to receive the highest favour? This is a great mystery; but the divine omnipotence is not to be limited by our narrow thoughts. It is most reasonable to believe, that God can do what we cannot discover how it is performed. Seneca prudently observes, that extraordinary effects in nature are unaccountable to us, as to their immediate proper causes, whilst we only consider the usual principles by which it works. Nay, in the most common works of nature, how many things are so perceptible to sense that none is so stupid as to deny them, yet imperceptible to reason as to the manner of their production? Who understands the admirable conjunction of the soul and body in man? How spirit and matter, the one celestial, the other earthly, should so strictly combine, and notwithstanding such diversity in their natures and properties, embrace with such concord in their inclinations? Now if the sharpest eye, fixed with the greatest attention, cannot discern the manner of this natural union, when the thing is above all doubt, can there be any pretence to disbelieve supernatural mysteries because we are not able to comprehend how they are affected?

3. There being infallible proofs that Jesus Christ was sent from God to make known his compassionate counsels for the salvation of man, the consequence is clear and necessary, that the doctrines of his Gospel are to be received, though ever so incomprehensible to the natural understanding. There is no demonstration more sure than the principle of faith; God has declared so, therefore it is true. It is in-

jurious to his honour to require any other proof of his word than his word. It is incomparably more certain that God cannot deceive us, than that our understandings are not deceived. Now, what is the main subject of the Gospel? It instructs us that "the Word was God, and the Word was made flesh." Can there be a more plain declaration who Jesus Christ is, that we may conceive aright of his natures, his virtues, his prerogatives and merits? It is not possible, without violence, to interpret the words otherwise than they plainly signify, that a divine Being assumed the human nature, and was God-Man. This was also declared by Jesus Christ. For when the Jews, supposing him to be a mere man, taxed him for the violation of the Sabbath, in his doing a miraculous cure on that day, he replied to their exception, "My Father works hitherto, and I work:" That is, as God is not subject to the law of the Sabbath, but uninterruptedly does the works of his merciful providence; so I, his Son, work in all times without limitation. This expression the Jews truly understood to import no less than an equality with God, a Son being of the same nature with his Father, and therefore charged him with blasphemy. Our Saviour allows their interpretation, but vindicates it from impiety by further declaring his communion with God in his will and power, that he performed divine works; that he might "receive the same divine honour as the Father had." And shall we not believe this testimony that Jesus Christ gives of himself? Did not the WORD understand the meaning of his own expressions? Could truth deceive? Was it possible for wisdom to speak im-

properly? Was power defective and unable to declare what it would have us to understand? How unreasonable is it, then, to object, How can this be? What pride is it to rebel against the divine revelation? What obstinacy to remain unsatisfied, unless we discover how terms so distant in themselves, the highest Being, GOD, and the lowest in the sphere of rational beings, man, should be so strictly united? How they should be so intimately joined without confusion of natures in one person, that it is truly said, God was humbled to the form of a servant, and man is raised to the right hand of God. Here it is our duty to subject our noblest faculty, the understanding, to divine revelation. In the doctrines of faith, as well as in the disposures of Providence, it is sufficient to check presumptuous curiosity, that God is the Author.

I shall add one consideration more: if Jesus Christ was not what he declared himself to be, the Son of God, he was a most impious man. For it is impiety in the supreme degree, for any in the pure order of creatures to assume divine honour: but the quality of his doctrine, and sanctity of his life, infinitely clear him from such a vile charge. For is it conceivable that a person, guilty of the highest, even sacrilegious pride, should be an instructor of the most perfect humility to the world? It is the special character of his religion that distinguishes it from all other institutions, that it preserves the divine glory entire; that it makes the profoundest impressions in the hearts of men of their meanness and vanity, and inspires them with an humble sense of their infinite distance from God. And for the holi-

ness of his life, I shall produce a testimony that can be liable to no exception; it is of Porphyry, a Platonic philosopher, who excelled as in learning and eloquence, so in malignity, the most furious enemies of Christianity; yet he was, by irresistible evidence, compelled to acknowledge, "That Jesus Christ was a most pious and excellent person, and that after his death he ascended into heaven." And is it credible that the same person, whose life was a glorious example of holiness and righteousness, should be guilty of the most transcendent wickedness? It is not possible for an unprejudiced mind to entertain such a suspicion.

That the Son of God was here below in a mean state, that he was exposed to the most cruel and ignominious death, if we consider the great end of his condescending goodness, it will appear to be most worthy of him; and that there is no contradiction in the things themselves, but in the perverse minds of infidels: for,

First, He was to redeem the world, not in the way of majesty, but by humble obèdience, and sufferings. Thus it was ordered by divine wisdom, for the honour of God's attributes and government. Now, if he had appeared in sensible glory, the design of his coming had been frustrated: who would have dared to condemn him to the infamous death of the cross? Who would have shed his blood, the price of our redemption? And it is very observable, that our Saviour made no use of his supernatural power, when the doing a miracle before Herod would have struck him with the reverence of him as divine, and might have preserved him from death. Nay,

when the glittering host of heaven, all the orders of angels, were in arms, ready, upon his least call, to have come, swifter than lightning, for his rescue, yet he meekly yielded himself up a bloody sacrifice to God, and an ignominious spectacle to men. For "thus it became him to fulfil all righteousness."

Secondly, Another great end of his coming, was to found a spiritual eternal kingdom; he was constituted a new Adam, to regenerate men to a holy blessed life, that were condemned, in the first Adam, to death and misery. Therefore, his life was a continual exercise of self-denial, a pattern of innocence and patience, of doing good and suffering evil. Thus he convinces us, that nothing is valuable in God's account but holiness. Thus, by his own example, he instructs us in the divine philosophy, to despise the good and evil things here, in order to our everlasting happiness. He ascended to heaven by the way of sufferings, and calls us to follow him. The fruit of blessedness is ingrafted on the thorns of poverty and persecution for his name's sake. The laws of his kingdom are inscribed on the body of his cross, and must be copied in the hearts of his subjects. And for this reason, when the apostles (who, after his resurrection, had some relics of their carnal conceit, that the kingdom of GOD should come with observation for its external splendour) asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" To raise their thoughts and affections above earthly things, he answered, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses of me, both in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the utmost ends of the earth."

Their preaching his life and death should be attended with the power of the Spirit, to dispense vigorous influence into the hearts of men for his imitation. And certainly his example is of admirable use and profit. For thus he sweetens and makes honourable those virtues, the exercise of which were very difficult and unpleasing, either in respect of their quality, being contrary to fleshly lusts, or as they expose to contempt in the opinion of the world. For who can refuse, or be ashamed to practise, the most severe self-denial, when in that he is made a copy of so divine an original as the Son of God? Now, considering what an influence his afflicted state has to procure eternal happiness for fallen man, and to prepare man for it, was it unbecoming him to descend thus low? Is it unbecoming that God loves as God? That as infinite wisdom and power appeared in the creation, so infinite mercy appears in our redemption? What is more divine than infinitely to exceed all the ideas we can frame of perfect love? To do greater things for his enemies, than men are willing to do for their dearest friends? And where sin abounds, that grace superabounds? Thus the eye of reason, cleared by revelation, sees that the voluntary humiliation of the Son of God for a time, is so far from diminishing, that it exalts his majesty. This is the great argument and motive of the adoration and solemn praise that reasonable creatures shall for ever pay unto him, wherein his derivative glory consists.

From what has been discoursed, we may see the just grounds of our firm assent and perfect adherence to the doctrine of the Gospel. There are not only

sufficient but abundant motives to induce our belief, so that it is an extreme wonder that any to whom it is revealed, should not see the truth so illustriously visible. The only account of such infidelity is given by the Apostle: "The god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The love of some lust, fleshly or spiritual, renders men averse from receiving it. The mysteries of godliness are not confined to the speculative mind, but are for moral ends, to regulate our lives. From hence it is, that the cordial belief of them very much depends on the temper and disposition of the soul. The sincere, humble inquirer, has an eminent advantage in the discovery of the truth and spiritual excellencies of the Gospel, above those who are overruled by corrupt habits. For the carnal heart either wholly turns the mind from thinking on those most sacred and deeply interesting objects, or weakens its intention, that it does not seriously and duly consider them. Men will studiously apply themselves to secular arts, and can discern the truth of abstruse mathematical theorems, that are not distasteful to their evil affections; yet, though the principles of the Christian faith are as unquestionable as the clearest propositions in geometry, they will not ponder those things that may convince and persuade them to believe what is directly opposite to their lusts. Besides, as corrupt humours vitiate the palate, and make what is pleasant bitter to the taste; so vicious desires darken and deprave the mind, and incline it to judge of doctrines to be true or false as

they are favourable or disagreeable to them. Carnal persons fortify every objection that may render the mysteries of godliness unlikely and incredible, and will be partial for sensuality. Of this, we have a great instance in the first rejection of the Gospel. The Jews expected the Messiah would come with pompous wonders, and external magnificence; that he would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and found a universal monarchy for them; and according to those carnal fancies they would understand the promises concerning him. Now, though JESUS CHRIST approved himself to be the Son of God, the true Messiah, by the sanctity of his life, the rectitude of his doctrine, and the divinity of his miracles, yet, for the poverty and meanness of his condition, being without any sensible show of greatness and glory, they despised him as most unworthy that divine relation and office. Though in him all the characters of the Messiah were conspicuous, and the Scriptures declare expressly, "that the Messiah the Prince should be cut off, but not for himself, but to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness:" yet they were so prepossessed with the ideas of a terrene felicity, that they would interpret all the Scriptures by that rule, as if the Messiah should come into the world to repair no other ruins but of their temporal state and liberty: therefore they spake of him with scornful titles: "As for this fellow we know not from whence he is:" and "is not this the carpenter's son?" Shall the glorious prophecies of the Messiah be accomplished in him? "Shall he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth?

Shall all kings bow down before him, and all nations serve him?" There was nothing to satisfy their sight in his outward appearance and retinue; and his miraculous condescension, so much below their expectations, was more powerful to harden them in unbelief, than all his supernatural operations to induce them to believe in him. And as the Jews, from their affection to secular things, were enemies to the Gospel; so the heathen philosophers, from spiritual pride: for they vainly affected the praise of knowledge and virtue, as the fruit of their own mind, and the product of their own will. They did not consider God as the fountain of truth; and whether the ray of his knowledge comes directly and immediately into us, or by reflection from others, the glory of it is entirely due to him. Besides, the great mysteries of godliness not being suitable to their first opinions, were rejected with disdain as foolish impossibilities. And in every age since, even in the pale of the church, there are some secret infidels that esteem the government a fable, and some who peremptorily deny the fundamental articles of Christianity. Those who are slaves to their eyes and appetites, will raise clouds to obscure that truth that forbids their dear lusts upon pain of damnation. The pretended difficulty of belief, is but a thin transparent pretence: the difficulty of practice is the true cause of their rejecting the Gospel. They would not have the precepts of it to be their duty, and, therefore, are unwilling to acknowledge the doctrines of it to be true. And those who set up a tribunal in their own understandings, to which divine revelation must submit, will not believe what

is above their presumptuous reason. But that the soul, exempt from passions and prejudice, has no just temptation to disbelieve the Christian doctrine, is evident; in that so many persons, in whom the concurrence of wisdom and virtue was equally flourishing and excellent, after the most exact discussion, embraced it as the heavenly truth. If there were falseness in its principles, or weakness in its proofs, how could it escape their discovery? And that they were sincere in their belief is above all doubt; for they willingly sacrificed all that is valuable and dear in this life for the profession of it. Now, was it ever known that any person would knowingly choose an error so destructive? The will, seduced by sense, embraces sometimes that which is condemned by reason, but it never adheres to those that are contrary both to reason and sense. By this it appears, that infidelity has no just plea from the insufficiency of the proofs of the Christian religion, which have fully satisfied the wisest, the most considerate and sincere, part of mankind. A corrupt heart is the spring and principle of the illusions of the mind in things that concern salvation.

2. The Gospel propounds to us the most proper and powerful motives of love to God. In the visible world there is a representation so conspicuous and full of his divine majesty, power, and wisdom, that formed and regulates all things, that it is not possible but the attentive regarding of it, will make impressions of reverence and fear, will raise our esteem and admiration. But those are dead sentiments without love; and that, in the guilty creature, fearful of God's wrath, must be first excited by the hopes of

his pardoning mercy. Now, " the love and kindness of God our Saviour appeared to man in his redemption," in the most eminent manner. Though, in that blessed work, the divine perfections are relucent in various effects, wisdom designed it, power accomplished it, holiness and righteousness were gloriously declared in it; yet, as it is applied to the benefit of man, it is the sole effect of wise, almighty, holy, tender love. Mercy softened God's bowels, opened heaven, sent down his Son to be one with us in nature, that he might exchange his merits and blessedness for our guilt and misery. Miraculous love! to make his only begotten Son our brother, to humble him to the condition of a servant, that we, most unworthy to be his servants, should be advanced to be his children; nay, to expose him to the death of a malefactor, equally ignominious and painful, that we malefactors might obtain life and glory. If ever love deserved the title of excess, it is this; for, though not without reason, yet it is without all bounds and measure. It is so far above our thought, that it is hard to have a firm belief of it. What the Psalmist speaks of the temporal deliverance of the church, is more justly applicable to its spiritual eternal deliverance: " When the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion, we were like to them that dream." As if a poor man, fancying, in a dream, that he is a king, adorned with the ensigns of royalty, and, between hopes and fears, should inquire of himself, Am I awake, and in my right mind? Is this sceptre, this robe, this crown, real? Or, is it all the pleasant deceit of imagination? And how can we reflect upon the amazing grace of God, that

brings salvation, but such thoughts will arise? Is it true, that God did not spare his most innocent and dear Son, to absolve us guilty rebels? Did he die for his Father's enemies and his own? Unparalleled love! only to be fully conceived by an infinite understanding. That the divine Father should seem to love us more than his only begotten Son, in giving him up to death for us; that the Son of God should love us more than his own life, in dying to reconcile us to his Father, were incredible, but for the testimony of God himself. Who can resist the sweet violence, the powerful attractives, of this love? How can any person, that has the use of reason to consider this great love, not be inflamed with affection towards his Saviour? How is it possible that these wide extremes should be found united,—the infinite goodness of God, and the equal unthankfulness of men? That they hate and offend, whom they are obliged, by the dearest titles, to love and serve. Methinks such unnatural ingratitude should only be found in hell; where despair of redemption has blotted out, in those lost souls, the memory of the love and merits of the Redeemer. But that on earth, where his most precious blood was shed, and is applicable for the salvation of all that will receive him by faith and love; that here injuries are returned for his inestimable benefits, is the most enormous impiety. 'What shall we render unto him for our evils which he hath suffered, for his benefits which he gives us? All that we can endure for his sake, is not comparable to one thorn of his bleeding crown. Let us return love, that is so infinitely due to him. Woe to us if we do not love him!'

Consider, further, that the same most free love that gave the Redeemer for us, hath revealed him to us. For who could have imagined that the Son of God should descend from his throne in heaven, and from the bosom of his Father, and become man, to save us by his sufferings? Who could have any hopes that the human nature, our low and heavy earth, should ascend above the heavens? The world, by natural light, knew no more of his coming to recover it from misery, than it perceived when the same Word in the creation raised it from the abyss of nothing. This should make us most sensible of his favour. But every one will pretend to love his Saviour. Now, that we may not deceive ourselves with a flashy affection, the rule of trial is plain: our love to him must correspond, in its kind and quality, with his love to us; and that was declared in doing and suffering what was requisite for our salvation. The precious tree does not heal the sore by its fragrancy, but must be wounded, to give it a sovereign balm. Our Saviour did not only express in words his compassionate sense of our misery—that alone had been sufficient—but "loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood." After his resurrection he showed his pierced hands and side to his disciples, not only the real proofs that he was Jesus that suffered, but of his love. They might see his heart open, and hands rent for them. And such a love is due to him. That which is only productive of leaves and blossoms, of affectionate words of our Saviour, but unfruitful in the works of holiness, may deceive men by a fair appearance; but not his eye, who judges of the truth and strength "of our love to

him, by our keeping his commandments." In short, as an active heat proceeds by an emanation from the fire; so a cheerful readiness and zeal to do the will of Christ, naturally flow from love consecrated to him. But, to enforce this the more, let us further consider,

3. We are obliged, by all the titles of gratitude and justice, of natural and divine reason, to walk as becomes the Gospel of Christ.

First, The dignity of the Author requires this of us. The Son of God came down from heaven, laid down his glory, that he might familiarly teach us our duty, in order to our happiness: "And if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?"

Secondly, The perfection and plainness of this rule. It is a wise observation, "That those laws are best for government, that are so clear and particular, that nothing is left to the will of the inferior judge, who is not usually so capable, and pure from by-respects, as the lawgiver." The Gospel is a light wherein all virtues shine in their bright eminence, and all vices blush in their odious deformity. It excludes all obscurity, that the meanest understandings may see the way to happiness. There can be no palliations and excuses for those who will rather argue than obey. For the revelation of God's will is so full and open in it, that it is direct rebellion not to yield entire subjection to it: "And they who know their Master's will, and do it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."

Thirdly, To commend it to our practice, we have an example of perfect obedience set before us. If Jesus Christ had represented in the world no other person but of "the word and wisdom of his Father;" as a master to regulate and guide us by his commands, had revealed to us the secrets of another world, and then ascended to heaven; the highest reverence and observance had been due to his laws. But to encourage and edge our industry, he was pleased to exhibit in his life a pattern of universal obedience. He gave us rules of such perfect holiness, that there seemed no necessity of his practice for our instruction: and the living image of his laws was so visible in his actions, that his sole example affords us a model of entire sanctity. There is no kind of virtue, from the lowest to the most heroic, of which he might not say, as he did to his disciples in his last Supper, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." And what should be more powerful in the breasts of Christians than a sacred ambition to be like the Son of God, than a dear affection to be conformed to their Saviour?

Fourthly, To excite us to our duty, the Gospel offers such a reward to encourage obedience, and threatens such prepared plagues against disobedience, that unless a man be miraculously transformed into a stupid beast, he cannot but be moved by them.

Now, what darkness of mind, or rather what perverseness of heart is it, if the great interest of the one and the other eternity, the blessed and the miserable, be not sufficient to work upon us? But

alas! how many, who pretend to be the disciples of Christ, do not obey him as their Master, love him as their Redeemer, nor fear him as their Judge? They live as if Christ had commanded them to please, not to "crucify, the flesh, and the lusts thereof:" as if he had bid them set all their affections, their loves, desires, hopes, joys, in the present perishing things, and not in everlasting things to come; to labour for the riches of this world, as if they were eternal inhabitants on the earth, and not strangers and pilgrims in the way to heaven. These are worse enemies of our Saviour than the heathens that do not know him, or the Jews that deny him. For, wearing the livery of his servants, they defame his most holy profession, obscure his glory, and blaspheme him in their lives. If infidels that never heard the sound of the Gospel, should see their conversation, what judgment would they make of the excellence of Christ, and the holiness of his law? They would blaspheme his goodness without defence. Unholy Christians are the most guilty sinners in the world. And their punishment will be heightened accordingly: for they exasperate mercy, and make the blood of atonement to cry for vengeance against them. If it be extreme perverseness to disbelieve the Gospel after so clear a revelation from God; what degree of folly and wickedness is it, for those who believe its truth, to contradict the evidence and design of it in their lives, as if there were no doubt of its falseness?

ON THE

DIVINE ORIGINAL,

AUTHORITY, AND SELF-EVIDENCING LIGHT AND POWER

OF

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

BY

JOHN OWEN, D. D.

ON THE

SELF-EVIDENCING LIGHT AND POWER

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES.

CHAPTER I.

The divine original of the Scripture the sole foundation of its authority.

THAT the whole authority of the Scripture depends solely on its divine original, is confessed by all who acknowledge its authority. The evincing and declaration of that authority being the thing at present aimed at, the discovery of its divine original, is, in the first place, necessarily to be premised.

As to the original of the Scripture of the Old Testament, it is said, 'God spake of old,' or formerly, 'in the prophets.' So God spake from the days of Moses the lawgiver, and downwards, to the consignation and bounding of the canon delivered to the Judaical church, in the days of Ezra and his companions, the "men of the great congregation." This being done only among the Jews, they, as his church, were "intrusted with the oracles of God." God spake "by the prophets," or, as Luke i. 70.

" by the mouth of the holy prophets;" but there seems to be somewhat farther intended in this expression.

In the exposition, or giving out the eternal counsel of the mind and will of God to men, there is to be considered, his speaking to the prophets, and his speaking by them to us. In this expression, it seems to be that voice from heaven, that came to the prophets, which is understood. So God spake in the prophets, and in reference thereto, there is propriety in that expression, " in the prophets." Thus the Psalms are many of them said to be, *To this*, or that man. " A golden psalm to David;" that is, from the Lord; and from thence their tongue was as the " pen of a writer." So God spake *in* them, before he spake *by* them.

The various ways of special revelation, by dreams, visions, audible voices, inspirations, with that peculiar one of the lawgiver under the Old Testament, called " face to face;" with that which is compared with it, and exalted above it, in the New, by the Son, " from the bosom of the Father;" are not of my present consideration, all of them belonging to the *manner* of the thing inquired after, not the thing itself.

By the assertion, then, laid down, of God " speaking in the prophets of old," from the beginning to the end of that long tract of time, consisting of one thousand years, wherein he gave out the writings of the Old Testament; two things are ascertained to us, which are the foundation of our present discourse.

1. That the laws they made known, the doc-

trines they delivered, the instructions they gave, the stories they recorded, the promises of Christ, the prophecies of Gospel-times they gave out and revealed, were not their own, not conceived in their minds, not formed by their reasonings, not retained in their memories from what they heard, not by any means beforehand comprehended by them, but were all of them immediately from God; there being only a passive concurrence of their rational faculties in their reception.

2. God was so with them, and, by the Holy Ghost, so spake in them, as to their receiving of the word from him, and their delivering of it to others, by speaking or writing, as that they were not themselves enabled by any habitual light, knowledge, or conviction of truth, to declare his mind and will, but only acted, as they were immediately moved by him. Their tongue in what they said, or their hand in what they wrote, was no more at their own disposal, than the pen is, in the hand of an expert writer.

Hence, as far as their own personal concerns, as saints and believers, lay in them, they are said to make a diligent inquiry into the things which the "Spirit of Christ, that spake in them, did signify." Without this, though their visions were express, so that their eyes were said to be open, yet they understood them not. Therefore, also, they studied the writings and prophecies of one another: Dan. ix. 2. Thus they attained a saving, useful, habitual knowledge of the truths delivered by themselves and others, by the illumination of the Holy Ghost, through the study of the word, even as we. But as to the receiving of the word from God, as God

spake in them, they obtained nothing by study or meditation, by inquiry or reading. Whether we consider the *matter* or *manner* of what they received and delivered, they were but as an instrument of music, giving a sound according to the hand, intention, and skill of him that strikes it.

This is variously expressed. Generally it is said, the "word was" to this or that prophet, which we have rendered "the word came" unto them. Ezek. i. 3. it "came expressly;" it had a subsistence given to it, or an effectual in-being, by the Spirit's entering into him; ver. 14. Now this coming of the word to them, had oftentimes such a greatness and expression of the majesty of God upon it, as it filled them with dread and reverence of him, Hab. iii. 16. and also greatly affected even their outward man, Dan. viii. 27. But this dread and terror, was peculiar to the Old Testament. The Spirit, in the declaration of the New Testament, gave out his mind and will in a way of more liberty and glory, 2 Cor. iii. The expressness and immediacy of revelation was the same, but the manner of it related more to that glorious liberty, in fellowship and communion with the Father, to which believers had then an access provided them by Jesus Christ. So our Saviour tells his apostles, Matt. x. 20. "You are not the speakers" of what you deliver, as other men are, the imagination of whose hearts is the fountain of all that they speak; and he adds this reason, "The Spirit of the Father *is* he that speaketh in you." Thus the word that came to them, was a book which they took *in* and gave *out*, without any alteration of one tittle or syllable.

Moreover, when the word was thus come to the prophets, and God had spoken in them, it was not in their power to conceal it, the hand of the Lord being strong upon them. They were not only, on a general account, to utter the truth they were made acquainted with, and to speak the things they had heard and seen, which was their common preaching-work; but also the very individual words that they had received, were to be declared. When the word was come to them, it was as a fire within them, that must be delivered, or it would consume them, Psal. xxxix. 3. Jer. xx. 9. Amos iii. 8. vii. 15, 16. So Jonah found his attempt to hide the word that he had received, to be altogether vain.

Now, because these things are of great importance, and the foundation of all that follows; namely, the discovery that the word is come forth to us from God, without the least mixture or intervenience of any medium liable to fallibility, (as is the wisdom, truth, integrity, knowledge, and memory, of the best of all men,) I shall farther consider it from one full and eminent declaration thereof, given unto us, 2 Pet. i. 20, 21. The words of the Holy Ghost are, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

That which he speaks of is, the "prophecy of Scripture," or written prophecy.

There were then traditions among the Jews, to whom Peter wrote, exalting themselves into competition with the written word, which not long after

got the title of an oral law, pretending to have its original from God. These the Apostle tacitly condemns; and also shows under what formality he considered that, which, ver. 19. he termed the "word of prophecy;" namely, as *written*. The written word, as such, is that whereof he speaks. Above fifty times is "the writing," or "the writings," in the New Testament, put absolutely for the word of God. And writing is so used in the Old, for the word of prophecy. The writing, or word written, is by inspiration from God. Not only the doctrine in it, but the writing itself, is so from him.

Hence, the providence of God hath manifested itself no less concerned in the preservation of the writings, than the doctrine contained in them. The writing itself, being the product of his own eternal counsel, for the preservation of the doctrine, after a sufficient discovery of the insufficiency of all other means for that purpose. And hence, the malice of Satan hath raged no less against the book, than the truth contained in it. The dealings of Antiochus, under the Old Testament, and of sundry persecuting emperors under the New, evince no less. And it was no less crime of old, to be "a betrayer of the book," than to be "a denier of the faith." It is true, we have not the autographs of Moses and the prophets, of the apostles and evangelists; but the copies which we have, contain every *iota* that was in them.

It is no doubt, but that, in the copies we now enjoy of the Old Testament, there are some diverse readings, or various lections. But yet we affirm, that the whole word of God, in every letter and

tittle, as given from him by inspiration, is preserved without corruption. Where there is any variety, it is always in things of less, indeed, of no importance. God, by his providence, preserving the whole entire, suffered this lesser variety to fall out, in the copies we have, for the quickening and exercising of our diligence, in our search into his word.

It is indeed a great relief against the inconvenience of corrupt translations, to consider, that, although some of them be bad enough, yet, if all the errors and mistakes that are to be found in all the rest, should be added to the worst of all, yet every necessary, saving, fundamental truth, would be found sufficiently testified to, therein. This "prophecy of Scripture," this written prophecy, saith the Apostle, "is not of any private interpretation." Some think that "interpretation" is put for inspiration or conception. In this sense, the importance of the words is the same with what I have already mentioned; namely, that the prophets had not their private conceptions, or self-fancied enthusiasms, of the things they spake. This, then, is the intention of the Apostle; the prophecy which we have written, the Scripture, was not an issue of men's fancied enthusiasms; not a product of their own minds and conceptions; not an interpretation of the will of God, by the understanding of man, that is, of the prophets themselves; neither their rational apprehensions, inquiries, conceptions of fancy, or imaginations of their hearts, had any place in this business; no self-inafflation, no rational meditation, managed at liberty by the understanding and wills of men, had place therein.

Of this, saith the Apostle, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." This is a principle to be acknowledged by every one that will believe any thing else. "Knowing," is not only to know, to perceive, to understand; but also to judge, own, and acknowledge. This, then, in our religion, is to be owned, acknowledged, submitted to, as a principle, without farther dispute. To discover the grounds of this submission and acknowledgment, is the business of the ensuing discourse.

That this is so indeed, and to give a reason why this is to be received as a principle, he adds, ver. 21. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man." That word of prophecy which we have written, is not of private conception; for, "it came not, at any time, by the will of man." The verb, ἠνέχθη, translated "it came," denotes to be "brought in," more than merely "it came;" it was brought into them by the will of God. The affirmative, as to the will of God, is included in the negative, as to the will of man. Or it came, as the voice from heaven to our Saviour on the mount, ver. 18. where the same word is used. So Ezek. i. 3. it was brought into him. Thus God brought the word to them, and spake in them, before he spake by them. As it was brought to them, it was "the voice of the Lord," Gen. iii. 8. or, as spoken by them, or written, it was properly "the word of God," which, by his immediate voice, he signified to the prophets. Thus, some of them in visions, first ate a written book, and then prophesied. And this is the first spring of the Scripture; the beginning of its emanation from the

counsel and will of God. By the power of the Holy Ghost, it was brought into the organs or instruments, that he was pleased to use, for the revelation of it to others.

That which remains for the completing of this dispensation of the word of God to us, is added by the Apostle: "But holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." When the word was thus brought to them, it was not left to their understandings, wisdoms, minds, memories, to order, dispose, and give out; but they were borne, acted, carried out by the Holy Ghost, to speak and write, all that, and nothing but that, to every tittle, that was so brought to them. They invented not words themselves, suited to the things they had learned, but only expressed the words they received. Though their mind and understanding were *used* in the choice of words, whence arises the difference in their manner of expression, (for they did use words of will or choice) yet they were so guided, that their words were not their own, but immediately supplied to them; and so they gave out the "writing of uprightness," and "words of truth" itself, Eccles. xii. 10. Not only the doctrine they taught was the word of truth, truth itself, John xvii. 17. but the words whereby they taught it, were words of truth from God himself. Thus, allowing the contribution of passive instruments in the reception and representation of words, (which corresponds to the mind and tongue of the prophets,) in the coming of the voice of God to them, every portion of the written word is equally divine, and as immediately from God, as the voice whereby he spake to the

prophets; and is therefore accompanied with the same authority in itself to us.

What hath been thus spoken of the Scripture of the Old Testament, must be also affirmed of the New; with this additional advantage and pre-eminence, that "it received its beginning of being spoken by the Lord himself," Heb. ii. 3. God spake in these last days, "in the Son," Heb. i. 2.

Thus God, who himself began the writing of the word with his own finger, after he had spoken it, Exod. xx. appointing or approving the writing of the rest that followed; Deut. xxxi. 12. Josh. xxiii. 6. 1 Kings ii. 3. 2 Kings xiv. 6. xvii. 13. Ezek. ii. 9, 10. Hab. ii. 2. Luke xvi. 29. John v. 39. xx. 31. Acts xvii. 11. doth lastly command the close of the immediate revelation of his will, to be written in a book, Rev. i. 11. and so gives out the whole of his mind and counsel to us in writing; as a merciful and steadfast relief, against all that confusion, darkness, and uncertainty, which the vanity, folly, and looseness of the minds of men, heightened by the unspeakable alterations that fall out amongst them, would otherwise have certainly run into.

Thus we have laid down the original of the Scriptures, from the Scripture itself; and this original is the basis and foundation of all its authority. Thus is it from God; entirely from him; as to the doctrine contained in it, and the words wherein that doctrine is delivered; what that speaks, he speaks himself. He speaks in it, and by it; and so it is vested with all the moral authority of God over his creatures.

CHAPTER II.

How we may know assuredly the Scripture to be the word of God.

HAVING laid the foundation that we are to build upon, I come now to the inquiry, whose resolution must thence be educed; that is, how we, and the rest of men in the world, who, through the merciful dispensation of God, have the book wherein the Scripture given out from him is contained, or said to be contained, who live so many ages from the last person who received any part of it immediately from God, may come to be ascertained, as to all the ends and purposes wherein we may be concerned, that the whole and entire written word in that book, hath the original, and consequently, the authority, that it pleads and avows; namely, that it is from God, in the way and manner laid down, and not the invention of men, or "cunningly-devised fables."

Now, seeing it is required of us by God himself, and that on the penalty of his eternal displeasure, if we fail in our duty (2 Thess. i. 8—10.), that we receive the Scripture not as we do other books, in relation to their author, with a firm opinion, built on prevailing probable arguments, but with divine and supernatural faith; it is especially inquired, What is the foundation and formal reason of our doing so? Whatever that be, it gives an answer to this important question,—"Why, or on what account, do you believe the Scriptures, or books of the Old and New

Testament, to be the word of God?" Now the formal reason of things being but one, whatever other inducements, or arguments, may tend to beget in us a persuasion that the Scripture is the word of God, yet they have no influence in that divine faith wherewith we are bound to believe them. They may indeed be of some use to repel the objections, that may be raised against the truth we believe; and so indirectly cherish and farther faith itself, but as concurring to the foundation, or formal reason of our believing, it is not capable of it.

Having, then, laid down the divine original of the Scriptures, and opened the manner of the word's coming forth from God, an answer shall now, on that sole foundation, be returned to this inquiry. And this I shall do in the following position :—

The authority of God, the supreme Lord of all, the first and only absolute truth, whose word is truth, speaking by the penmen of the Scriptures, evinced singly by the Scripture itself, is the sole foundation, or formal reason, of our assenting to those Scriptures as his word, and of our submitting our hearts and consciences to them, with that faith and obedience which is due to him alone.

God, speaking in the penmen of the Scripture, Heb. i. 1. his voice to them was accompanied with its own evidence, which gave assurance to them; and God, speaking by them, or their writings, to us, his word is accompanied with its own evidence and assurance to us. His authority and veracity do so sufficiently manifest themselves, that men may quietly repose their souls upon them, in believing and obedience. Thus are we built "on the foundation of the prophets and apostles," in our believing.

That, then, which, to the establishment of the souls of believers, I shall labour to prove, is plainly this: that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament do abundantly and uncontrollably manifest themselves to be the word of the living God; so that, merely on the account of their own proposal of themselves to us, in the name and majesty of God, without assistance from tradition, church, or any thing else without themselves, we are obliged, upon the penalty of eternal damnation, to receive them with that subjection of soul which is due to the word of God. The authority of God shining in them, they afford to us all the divine evidence of themselves which God is willing to grant, or is any way needful for us. So, then, the authority of the written word is from itself, as the word of God, and the eviction of that authority to us is by itself.

The authority of the Scripture is strictly its power to command, and require obedience, in the name of God. To ask, then, whence it hath its authority, is to ask, whence it hath its power to command in the name of God. Surely men will not say, that the Scripture hath its power to command in the name of God from any thing but itself. And it is indeed a contradiction for men to say, "They give authority to the Scriptures." Why do they give this authority to that book rather than another? They must say, "Because it is the word of God." So the reason why they give authority to it, is the formal reason of all its authority, which it hath antecedently to their charter and concession of power; "Thy word is truth."

Some say, indeed, that the Scripture hath its

authority in itself, from its own divine original, but not in respect of us; and that we may know, understand, and submit to its authority, it must be testified to from some other person or thing appointed thereunto.

Ans. 1. But may not this be said of God himself, as well as of his word? If God reveal himself to us, it must be by means; and if those means do not reveal him, unless they are testified to from somewhat else, God cannot reveal himself to us. If God and his word will keep themselves to themselves, they may be God and his word still, and keep their authority; but if they will put forth their commands to us, let them look that they get the church's testimonials, or, on this principle, they may be safely rejected. But,

2. Authority is a thing that no person can have in himself, without respect of others. In its very nature, it relates to others that are subject to it. All authority arises from relation. The authority of God over his creatures, is from their relation to him as their Creator. A king's authority is in respect of his subjects. The authority of a minister relates to his flock; and he who hath no flock, hath no authority of a minister. If he have not a ministerial authority, in reference to a flock, a people, a church, he can have none in himself. So is it in this case: if the Scripture hath no authority, in respect of us, it hath none in itself, nor can have. If it hath it in itself, it hath it in respect of us. Such a right to command and oblige to obedience, is as inseparable from authority, or a moral power, as heat is from fire. It is true, a man may have a lawful authority over

those, whom, in practice, he cannot force or compel to obedience. But want of force doth not lessen authority. God looseth not his authority over men, though he put not forth towards them "the greatness of his power, or the efficacy of the might of his strength," to cause them to obey. It is foolish then to imagine, that a man should have an authority in himself, and yet not have that authority in respect of those who are subject to it. That is not properly a law at all, which is not a law to some. Besides, all the evil of disobedience relates to the authority of him that requires the obedience. No action is disobedience, but from the subjection of him who performs, to him who requires obedience. And therefore, if the Scripture hath not an authority in itself towards us, there is no evil in our disobedience to its commands. I speak of it as considered in itself, without the testimony pretended as necessary to give it an authority over us. Hitherto, then, have we carried this objection,—that to disobey the commands of the Scripture, before it receive a testimony from men, is no sin.

The sense, then, of our position, is evident and clear; and so our answer is given to the inquiry. The Scripture hath all its authority from its Author, both in itself, and in respect of us; and that it hath the author and original pleaded for, it declares itself, without any other assistance; the truth of which I shall now confirm, 1. By one general induction. 2. By testimonies. 3. By arguments, expressing the ways and means of its revelation of itself.

There are three ways, by which God, in several degrees, reveals himself, his properties, his mind, and will, to the sons of men.

1. He doth it by his works, both of creation and providence: "All thy works praise thee." "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament telleth the works of his hands. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night declareth knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out throughout the earth, and their word to the end of the world." "God who made the heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein, suffered in times past all nations to walk in their own ways; yet he left not himself without a witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." And, "God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing he is the Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things, and hath made of one blood all mankind to dwell on the face of the earth, and assigned the seasons which were ordained before, and the bounds of their habitations, that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." "For that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them; for the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." The sum of these passages amounts to this—that God reveals and declares himself to us, by the works of his hands.

2. God declares himself, his sovereign power and

authority, his righteousness and holiness, by the innate light of nature, and principles of the consciences of men. That indispensable moral obedience, which he requires of us as his creatures, subject to his law, is in general thus made known to us. For "the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law; they, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, showing the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts in the mean time excusing or accusing one another," Rom. ii. 14, 15. By the light that God hath indelibly implanted in the minds of men, accompanied with a moral instinct of good and evil, seconded by that self-judgment which he hath placed in us, in reference to his authority over us, doth he reveal himself to the sons of men.

3. God reveals himself by his word, as is already proved. It remains then what we inquire, how we may know, and ascertain that these things are not deceivable pretences, but that God doth indeed so reveal himself by them.

First, The works of God have that expression of God upon them, that stamp and character of his eternal power and Godhead, that evidence with them that they are his, that wherever they are seen and considered, they undeniably evince that they are his works, and that what they teach concerning him, they do it in his name and authority. There is no need of traditions—no need of miracles—no need of the authority of any church to convince a rational creature, that the works of God are his, and his only; and that He is eternal and infinite in power

that made them. They carry about with them their own authority. By being what they are, they declare whose they are. To reveal God by his works, there is need of nothing, but that they be presented to the consideration of rational creatures.

The voice of God in nature, is, in like manner, effectual. It declares itself to be from God by its own light and authority. There is no need to convince a man, by substantial witnesses, that what his conscience speaks, it speaks from God. Whether it bear testimony to the being, righteousness, power, omniscience, or holiness of God himself; or, whether it call for that moral obedience, which is eternally and indispensably due to him, and so shows forth the "work of the law in the heart," it so speaks that, without farther evidence or reasoning, but what is supplied by itself—it discovers its Author, from whom it is, and in whose name it speaks. Those common notions and general presumptions of him and his authority, that are inlaid in the natures of rational creatures by the hand of God, are able to plead their own divine original, without the least assistance from without.

Now, the Psalmist says unto God, "Thou hast magnified over all thy name the word" thou hast spoken. The name of God is all that whereby he makes himself known. Over all this, God magnifies his word. The name of God is not here God himself, but every thing whereby God makes himself known. Now, it were very strange that those low, dark, and obscure means of the revelation of God and his will, which we have mentioned, should be able to evince themselves to be from him, without

any external testimony, or authority, while that which is by God himself magnified above them, which is far more noble and excellent in itself, and hath far more divinely conspicuous and glorious impressions and characters of his goodness, holiness, power, grace, truth, than all the creation, should yet lie dead, obscure, and have nothing in itself to reveal its Author, until some superadded testimony be called in to its assistance. We esteem those to have done no service to the truth, who insist that there is no natural knowledge of God arising from the innate principles of reason, and the works of God: let the way to the progress of supernatural revelation be obstructed, by denying that it is able to demonstrate itself to be from God, and we shall quickly see what banks are cut to let in a flood of Atheism upon the face of the earth.

Let us consider the result of this general induction. As God, in the creation of the world, and all things therein, hath so made and framed them—hath left such characters of his eternal power and wisdom on them, filled with such evidences of their Author, suited to the apprehensions of rational creatures, that without any other testimony than the naked consideration of what they are, they so far declare their Creator, that they are left wholly inexcusable, who will not learn, and know him from thence; so, in the giving out of His word to be the foundation of that world, which he hath set up in this world, as "a wheel within a wheel," his church; he hath, by his Spirit, impressed on it such characters of his goodness, power, wisdom, holiness, love to mankind, truth, faithfulness, with all the rest of his glorious excellencies and perfec-

tions, that at all times, and in all places, without any other witness or testimony given to it, it declares itself to be his, and makes good its authority from him, so that the refusal of it upon its own evidence, brings unavoidable condemnation on the souls of men. This comparison is insisted on by the Psalmist, Psalm xix. where, as he ascribeth a "voice," and "line" to the creatures; so he ascribeth light, power, stability, and permanency, like that of the heavens and sun, as constituting properties of the Word, and in an inexpressible exaltation of it above them; the light of one day of this sun being unspeakably more than that of seven others, as to the manifestation of the glory of God.

This, then, is fixed as a principle of truth—Whatever God hath appointed to reveal himself by, for any special or general end, that those to whom he intends to discover himself, may either be effectually instructed in his will, according to the degree and means of the revelation afforded, or be left inexcusable for not receiving the testimony which he gives of himself, by any pretence of want of clear, evident revelation;—*that*, whatever it be, hath such an impression of his authority upon it, as undeniably to evince that it is from him.

CHAPTER III.

Of Miracles, their efficacy to beget Faith, compared with the Word.

HAVING declared the divine original and authority of the Scripture, way is now made for the considera-

tion of those self-evidences of its divine rise, and, consequently authority, that it is attended with, on account of which we receive it as the word of God.

The arguments by which any thing is confirmed, are of two sorts; inartificial, by the way of testimony; and artificial, by the way of deductions and inferences. Whatever is capable of contributing evidence to truth, falls under one of these two heads. Both these kinds of proofs we shall make use of. Some profess they own the authority of the Scriptures, and also urge others so to do; but they dispute on what grounds they do so. With those we may deal in the first way, by testimony from the Scriptures themselves; which, upon their own principles, they cannot refuse. When they shall be pleased to inform us, that they no longer own the Scripture to be the word of God, we will withdraw the witnesses, whom, for the present, we make use of. Testimonies that are innate, and ingrafted in the word itself, used only as artificial arguments to be deduced from them, may be used to those who own not the authority of the Scripture, or who are desirous to try their skill in the management of a controversy against the word of God.

In both these cases, the testimony of the Scripture is pleaded, and is to be received, and cannot, with any pretence of reason, be refused; in the former, on account of the acknowledged authority and veracity of the witness, though speaking in its own case; in the latter, on account of that self-evidence which the testimony insisted on is accompanied with, made out by such reasonings and arguments, as persons who own not its authority cannot but admit. In

human things, if a man of known integrity and unspotted reputation bear witness in any cause, and give uncontrollable evidence to his testimony, from the very nature of the things of which he speaks, as it is expected that those who admit of his integrity and reputation should acquiesce in his assertion, so those to whom he is a stranger, who are not moved by his authority, will yet assent to what is witnessed by him; from the nature of the things he asserts, especially if there be a coincidence of all such circumstances as are any way needful to give evidence to the matter in hand.

Thus it is in the case under consideration. For, those who profess to believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, and so own the credit and fidelity of the witness, it may reasonably be expected, yea, in strict justice demanded, of them, that they stand to the testimony. By saying that the Scripture is the word of God, and then commanding us to prove it so to be, they render themselves obnoxious to every testimony that we produce from it. This witness they cannot waive, without disavowing their own professed principles.

As for those with whom we have not the advantage of their own acknowledgment, it is not reasonable to impose upon them the bare testimony of that witness, concerning whom the question is, whether he be worthy the acceptation pleaded for; but yet arguments taken from the Scripture, from its nature and operation, by which the causes of all things are discovered, are not to be refused.

But it is neither of these, that principally I intend to deal with; my present discourse is rather

about the satisfaction of our own consciences, than the answering of others' objections. Only, we must satisfy our consciences upon such principles as will stand against all men's objections. This, then, is chiefly inquired after; what it is that gives such an assurance of the Scriptures being the word of God, as that we have a sure foundation for our receiving them as such; and from whence it is, that those who receive them not, are left inexcusable in their damnable unbelief. This we say, is in and from the Scripture itself; so that there is no other need of any farther witness or testimony, nor is any to be admitted.

I shall content myself with instancing in some few testimonies and arguments, beginning with the first sort, Isaiah viii. 20. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, there is no light in them." Whatever any one says, be it church or person, if it be about the things of God, his will, or worship, or our obedience to him, it is to be tried by the law and testimony. Hither we are sent; this is asserted to be the rule and standard, the touchstone of all speakings whatever. Now, that must speak alone for itself, which must try all but itself, yea, itself also.

But what doth this law and testimony; that is, this written word plead, on account of which it should be thus attended to? What doth it urge for its acceptation? Tradition, authority of the church, miracles, consent of men? or, doth it speak by its own absolute authority, and stand only upon its own sovereignty? The Apostle gives us his answer to this inquiry, 2 Tim. iii. 16. "All Scrip-

ture is given by inspiration." Its *plea* for reception, in comparison with, and opposition to, all other ways of coming to the knowledge of God, his mind and will, founded on which it calls for submission with supreme uncontrollable authority, is its "divine inspiration." It remains then only to be inquired, whether, when divine inspiration is "pleaded," there be any middle way, but either that it be received with divine faith, or rejected as false.

Suppose a man were "divinely inspired," and should so profess himself in the name of the Lord, as did the prophets of old, Amos vii. it will not be denied, but that his message were to be received and submitted to on that account. The denial of it would justify those who "rejected and slew those that spake to them in the name of the Lord." And, it is to say in plain terms, we may reject those whom God sends. Though miracles were given only with respect to *persons*, not *things*; yet most of the prophets who wrought no miracles, insisted on this, that being "divinely inspired," their doctrine was to be received, as from God. In their so doing, it was sin, even unbelief, and rebellion, against God, not to submit to what they spake in his name. And it always so fell out, to fix our faith on the right foundation, that scarcely any prophet that spake in the name of God, had any approbation from the church, in whose days he spake, Matt. v. 12. xxiii. 29. Luke xix. 47, 48. Acts vii. 52. Matt. xxi. 33, 38. It is true there were "false prophets," that spake in the name of the Lord, when he sent them not, Jer. xxiii. 21, 22. Yet were those whom he did send, to be received on pain of damnation; and

on the same penalty were the others to be refused, Jer. xxiii. 28, 29. The foundation of this duty lies in the divine power that accompanied the word that was of divine inspiration. And, without a supposal hereof, it could not consist with the goodness and righteousness of God, to require men, under the penalty of his eternal displeasure, to make such a discrimination, when he had not given them infallible tokens to enable them so to do.

But that he hath done so, he declares, Jer. xxiii. "How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? that are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams, which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully: What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the mountains in pieces?" In the latter days of that church, when the people were most eminently perplexed with false prophets, both as to their number and subtlety, yet God lays their eternal and temporal safety, or ruin, on their discerning aright between his word and that which was only pretended so to be. And that they might not complain of this, he tenders them security of its easiness of performance. Speaking of his own word comparatively, as to every thing that is not so, he says, it is as wheat to chaff, which may infallibly be discerned from it; and then absolutely, that it hath such properties, as will discover itself, even light,

heat, and power. A person, then, who was divinely inspired, was to be attended to because he was so.

The Scriptures, then, being, as was said before, divinely inspired, is not the case the same, as with a man that was so? Is there any thing in the writing of it by God's command, that should impair its authority? Nay, is it not freed from innumerable prejudices that attended it, in its first giving out by men; arising from the personal infirmities, and supposed interests of them that delivered it? Jer. xliii. 3. John ix. 29. Acts xxiv. 5.

This being pleaded, and insisted on, its testimony is received, or it is not. If it be received on this account, there is in it, we say, the proper foundation of faith, whereon it hath its subsistence. If it be rejected, it must be not only with a refusal of its witness, but also with a high detestation of its pretence to be from God. What ground for such a refusal and detestation any one can have, shall be afterward considered. If it be a sin to refuse it, it had been a duty to receive it: if a duty to receive it as the word of God, then was it sufficiently manifested so to be. Of the objection arising from those who pretend to this inspiration falsely, we have spoken before; and we are, as yet, dealing with those that own the book to be the word of God, and only call in question the grounds on which they, or others, ought so to do. As to these, it may suffice that, in the strength of all the authority and truth they profess to acknowledge in it, it declares the foundation of its acceptance to be no other, but its own divine inspiration; hence it is "a saying worthy of all acceptation."

Again, in that dispute between Abraham and the rich man, Luke xvi. 31. about the best and most effectual means of bringing men to repentance; the rich man in hell, speaking his own conception, fixes upon miracles—if one rise from the dead, and preach, the work will be done: Abraham is otherwise minded; that is, Christ, the Author of that parable, was so: he bids them attend to Moses and the prophets, the written word, as that on which all faith and repentance was immediately to be grounded. The inquiry being, how men might be best assured that any message is from God, if the word did not manifest itself to be from him, this direction had not been just.

The ground of the request for the rising of one from the dead, is laid in the common apprehension of men, not knowing the power of God in the Scriptures; who think, that if an evident miracle were wrought, all pretences of unbelief would be excluded? Our Saviour discovers that mistake, and lets men know, that those who will not own, or submit to, the authority of God in the word, would not be moved by the most signal miracles. If a holy man, whom we had known assuredly to have been dead for some years, should rise out of his grave, and come unto us with a message from God, could any man doubt, whether he were sent unto us of God or no? I suppose not. Yet the evidence of the mission of such a one, and the authority of God speaking in him, our Saviour being judge, is not of greater efficacy to enforce belief, than the written word, nor a surer foundation for faith to repose itself upon.

Could we hear a voice from heaven, accompanied with such a divine power, as to evidence itself to be from God, should we not rest in it as such? I suppose men think they would; can we think that any man should withdraw his assent, and say, yea, but I must have some testimony that this is from God; all such evasions are precluded in the supposition, wherein a self-evidencing power is granted. What greater miracles did the apostles of Christ ever behold, or hear, than that voice that came "from the most excellent glory, This is my beloved Son:" yet Peter, who heard that voice, tells us, that, comparatively, we have greater security from the written word, than they had in and by that miraculous voice: "We heard," saith he, "that voice indeed; but we have a more sure word of prophecy" to attend to. More sure, not in itself, but in its giving out its evidence to us. And how doth it appear so to be? The reason he alleges for it, was before insisted on: 2 Pet. i. 18.—20.

Yea, suppose that God should speak to us from heaven, as he spake to Moses or Christ,—how should we be able to know it to be the voice of God? Cannot Satan cause a voice to be heard in the air, and so deceive us? Or, may not there be some way found out, by which men might impose upon us with their delusions. Pope Celestine thought he heard a voice from heaven, when it was but the cheat of his successor. Must we not rest at last in that divine power, which accompanies the true voice of God, evidencing itself beyond all possibility of mistake. Now, did not this evidence accompany the written word, at its first giving forth? If it did not, how

could any man be obliged to discern it from all delusions? if it did, how came it to loose it? Did God appoint his word to be written, that he might destroy its authority? If the question be, whether the doctrines, proposed to be believed, are truths of God, or "cunningly-devised fables," we are sent to the Scripture itself alone, to give the determination.

CHAPTER IV.

The Self-Evidencing efficacy of the Scriptures.

HAVING given some few instances of those many testimonies, which the Scripture in express terms bears to itself, and the rise and fountain of all that authority which it claims over the sons of men, which all those who pretend to acknowledge its divinity are bound and obliged by; the second thing proposed, or the innate arguments that the word of God is furnished with for its own manifestation, and whereby the authority of God is revealed for faith to repose itself upon, comes next into consideration. Now, these arguments contain the full and formal grounds of our answer to that inquiry, why we receive and believe the Scripture to be the word of God. It being the formal reason of our faith that is inquired after, we answer—we believe, and submit to it, because of the authority of God who speaks it, or gave it forth as his mind and will, evidencing itself by the Spirit, in that word, to our minds and consciences.

The self-evidencing efficacy of the Scripture, and the grounds of it, is that, then, which I shall endeavour to clear and vindicate. This only I shall premise, that whereas some grounds of this efficacy seem to be placed in the things themselves contained in the Scripture, I shall not consider them abstractedly as such, but merely their being the Scripture or written word of God; without which consideration, the things mentioned, would be left naked and utterly divested of their authority and efficacy pleaded for; and be of no other nature and importance, than the same things found in other books. It is the writing itself that now supplies the place of the persons, by whom God originally spake to men. As were the persons speaking of old, so are the writings now: it was the word spoken that was to be believed, because spoken by them from God; and it is now the word written that is to be believed, because written by the appointment of God.

There are two things, that are accompanied with a self-evidencing excellency; and every other thing doth so, so far as it is a partaker of their nature, and no otherwise; now these are, 1. Light. 2. Power in operation.

1. Light manifests itself. Whatever is light doth so; that is, it doth whatever is necessary, on its own part, for its manifestation and discovery. Whatever manifests itself is light. Light requires neither proof nor testimony for its evidence. Let the sun arise in the firmament, and there is no need of witnesses to prove to a seeing man that it is day. A small candle will do so. Let the least child bring

a candle into a room that before was dark, and it would be a madness to prove, by substantial witnesses, men of gravity and authority, that light is brought in. Doth it not evince itself, with an assurance above all that can be obtained by any testimony whatever? Whatever is light, either naturally or morally, is revealed by its being so. That which evidenceth not itself, is not light.

That the Scripture is a light, or can be called so, unless it hath this nature and property of light to evidence itself, as well as to give light to others, cannot in any tolerable correctness of speech be allowed. Whether light, spiritual and intellectual, regarding the mind, or natural, with respect to the body, be firstly and properly light, from whence the other is by allusion denominated, I need not now inquire. Both have the same properties in their several kinds: "true light shineth," 1 John i. 5. God himself is light; and he inhabiteth, not a shining glistering brightness, as some grossly imagine, but the glorious unsearchable majesty of his own being, which is inaccessible to our understandings. So saith the Psalmist, "thou clothest thyself with light:" and Dan. ii. 22. "light remaineth with him." God is light essentially, and is therefore known by the beaming of his eternal properties, in all that outwardly is of him. And light abides with him, as the fountain of it; he communicating light to all others. This being the fountain of all light, the more it participates of the nature of the fountain, the more it is light. It is then spiritual, moral, intellectual light, with all its mediums, that hath the pre-eminence, as to a participation of the nature and properties of light.

Now the Scripture, the word of God, is light; those that reject it are called "light's rebels," men resisting the authority which they cannot but be convinced of. Psal. xix. 9. xliii. 3. cxix. 105, 130. Prov. vi. 23. Isa. ix. 2. Hos. vi. 5. Matt. iv. 16. v. 14. John iii. 20, 21. It is a light, so shining with the majesty of its author, as that it manifests itself to be his. "A light shining in a dark place," with an eminent advantage for its own discovery, as well as to the benefit of others.

Let a light be ever so mean and contemptible, yet if it shines, casts out rays in a dark place, it will evidence itself. If other things be wanting in the faculty, the light, as to its innate glory and beauty, is not to suffer prejudice. But the word is a glorious shining light; an illuminating light; compared to, and preferred above, the light of the sun, Psal. xix. 5—7. Rom. x. 18. Let not then a reproach be cast upon the most glorious light in the world, the most eminent reflection of uncreated light and excellencies, that will not be fastened on any thing, that on any account is so called, Matt. v. 19.

Now, as the Scripture is thus a light, we grant it to be the duty of every church, to hold it up, by which it may become the more conspicuous. It is a ground, and pillar to set this light upon. In 1 Tim. iii. 15. "the pillar and ground of the truth," may refer to the mystery of godliness, in the words following, in good coherence of speech, as well as to the church; but, granting the usual reading, no more is affirmed, but that the light and truth of the Scripture is held up by the church. It is the duty of every church, almost the whole of its

duty so to do. And this duty it performs ministerially, not authoritatively. A church may bear up the light, but it is not the light itself. It bears witness to it, but kindles not one divine beam to farther its discovery. All the preaching that is in any church, its administration of ordinances, all its walking in the truth, hold up this light.

Nor doth it in the least impair this self-evidencing efficacy of the Scripture, that it is a moral and spiritual, not a natural light. The proposition is universal to all kinds of light; yea, more fully applicable to the former than the latter. Light, of itself, will not remove the defect of the visive faculty. It is not given for that end; light is not eyes. It suffices that there is nothing wanting on its own part, for its discovery and revelation. To argue that the sun cannot be known to be the sun, or the great means of communicating external light to the world, because blind men cannot see it, will scarcely be admitted; nor doth it in the least impeach the efficacy of the light pleaded for, that men stupidly blind cannot comprehend it, John i. 5.

I do not assert from hence, that wherever the Scripture is brought, all that read it must instantly, of necessity, assent to its divine original. Many men (who are not stark blind) may have so abused their eyes, that when a light is brought into a dark place, they may not be able to discern it. Men may be so prepossessed with innumerable prejudices, principles received by strong traditions, corrupt affections making them hate the light, that they may not behold the glory of the Word, when it is brought to them. But it is nothing to our present argument,

whether any man living be able, of himself, to discern this light, while the defect may be their own blindness. "By the manifestation of the truth, we commend ourselves to every one's conscience in the sight of God; but if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." There is in the dispensation of the word, an evidence of truth commending itself to the consciences of men; some receive not this evidence; is it for want of light in the truth itself? No: that is a glorious light that shines into the hearts of men. Is it for want of testimony to assert this light? No: but merely because the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of men, that they should not behold it.

From what, then, hath been laid down, these two things may be inferred:—

1. That as the authority of God, the first and only absolute truth, in the Scripture, is that alone which divine faith rests upon; so, wherever the word comes, it hath in itself a sufficiency of light to evidence to all, (and will do it eventually to all that are not blinded by the god of this world,) that authority of God, its author; and the only reason why it is not received by many in the world, to whom it is come, is the advantage that Satan hath to keep them in ignorance and blindness, by the lusts, corruptions, prejudices, and hardness of their own hearts.

The word, then, makes a sufficient proposition of itself, wherever it is. And he to whom it comes, who refuses it, because it comes not so or so testified,

must give an account of his atheism and infidelity. He that hath the witness of God, need not stay for the witness of men, for the witness of God is greater.

Wherever the word is received, as it requireth itself to be received, and is really assented to as the word of God, it is so received upon the evidence of that light which it hath in itself, manifestly declaring itself so to be. It is all one by what means, whether of a child or a church, by common consent of men or peculiar providence, the Scripture comes to us; come how it will, it hath its authority in itself, towards us, by being the word of God; and hath its power of manifesting itself so to be, from its own innate light.

Now, this light in the Scripture, for which we contend, is nothing but the beaming of the majesty, truth, holiness, and authority of God, given to it, and left upon it, by its author, the Holy Ghost; an impress it hath of God's excellency upon it, distinguishing it, by infallible signs, from the product of any creature. By this it dives into the consciences of men, into all the secret recesses of their hearts; guides, teaches, directs, determines, and judges in them, in the name, majesty, and authority of God. If men who are blinded by the god of this world, will yet deny this light, because they perceive it not, it shall not prejudice those who do. By this self-evidencing light, I say, doth the Scripture make such a proposition of itself, as the word of God, that whoever rejects it, doth it at the peril of his eternal ruin; and thereby a foundation is tendered for that faith which it requireth to repose itself upon.

For the proof, then, of the divine authority of the

Scriptures, to those who do not acknowledge it, I shall only suppose, that, by the providence of God, the book itself be so brought to them, as that they be engaged to the consideration of it. This is the work of God's providence in the government of the world; and if it evidence not itself to their consciences, it is because they are blinded by the god of this world, which will be no plea for the refusal of it at the last day: and they who receive it not on this ground, will never receive it on any, as they ought.

The second sort of things that evidence themselves, are things of an effectual powerful operation of any kind. So doth fire by heat, the wind by its noise and force, salt by its taste, the sun by its light and heat; so do also moral principles that are effectually operative, Rom. ii. 14, 15. Men in whom they are, do manifest them by their working and efficacy. Whatever it be that hath an innate power in itself, that will effectually operate on a proper subject, is able to evidence itself, and its own nature and condition.

To manifest the right of the Scripture to be enrolled among things of this nature, yea, under God himself, who is known by his great power, and the effects of it, to have the pre-eminence, I shall only observe one or two things, the various improvement of which would take up more space than I have allotted to this discourse.

It is absolutely called "the power of God;" and that to its proper end, in which lies the tendency of its efficacy in operation. It is "the power of God," Rom. i. 16. The "word concerning the cross," that is, the Gospel, is the "power of God;" and

faith, which is built on that word, without other helps or advantages, is said to stand in the " power of God," 1 Cor. ii. 5. That is, effectually working by the word. It worketh " in demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" its spiritual power gives a demonstration of it. Thus it comes not as a naked word, but " in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;" giving all manner of assurance and full persuasion of itself, even by its power and efficacy. Hence it is termed " the rod of power," or strength, Psalm cx. 2. denoting both authority and efficacy. Surely that which is thus the power and authority of God, is able to make itself known so to be.

It is not only said to be " power," the power of God, in itself, but also " able and powerful," in respect of us. " Thou hast learned," saith Paul to Timothy, " the sacred letters," (the written word,) " which are able to make thee wise unto salvation." They are powerful and effectual to that purpose. It is " the word that hath power in it to save," James i. 21. So Acts xx. 32. " I commend you to the able powerful word." And, that we may know what kind of power it hath, the Apostle tells us that it is " living and effectual," and " sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." It is designed of God, to declare the effectual working of his power. See John vi. 68, 69. Gal. ii. 8. By virtue of this power, it brought forth fruit in all the world, Col. i. 6. Without sword, without human wisdom or oratory, without any in-

ducements or motives, but what were solely taken from itself—consisting in things that " eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor could enter into the heart of man to conceive"—hath it exerted its power and efficacy, to the conquest of the world; causing men so to fall down before its divine authority, as immediately to renounce all that was dear to them in the world, and to undergo whatever was terrible and destructive to nature, in all its dearest concerns.

It hath been the work of many to insist on the particulars, wherein this power exerts itself; so that I shall not enlarge upon them. In general, they have this advantage, that, as they are all spiritual, so they have their seat and abode in the hearts and consciences of men, whereby they are not liable to any exception, as though they were pretended. Men cannot harden themselves in the rejection of the testimony they give, by sending for magicians to do the like; or by pretending that it is a common thing that is befallen those on whom the word puts forth its power. The seat and residence of these effects, is safe-guarded against all power and authority but that of God. Its diving into the hearts, consciences, and secret recesses of the minds of men; its judging and sentencing of them in themselves; its convictions, terrors, and conquests of men; its converting, building up, making wise, holy, obedient; its administering consolations in every condition, and the like effects of its power, are usually spoken to.

These are briefly the foundations of the answer to the inquiry, How know we that the Scripture is the word of God; how may others come to be as-

sured thereof? The Scripture, we say, bears testimony to itself, that it is the word of God; that testimony is the witness of God himself, which, whoso doth not accept and believe, he doth what in him lies to make God a liar. To give us an infallible assurance that, in receiving this testimony, we are not imposed upon by cunningly-devised fables; "the Scriptures" have that glory of light and power accompanying them, as wholly distinguishes them, by infallible signs and evidences, from all words and writings not divine; conveying their truth and power into the souls and consciences of men with an infallible certainty. On this account are they received, by all that receive them as from God.

CHAPTER V.

Of the testimony of the Spirit. Traditions. Miracles.

BEFORE I proceed to the consideration of those other testimonies, which are as arguments drawn from those innate excellencies and properties of the word which I have insisted on, some other things, whose right understanding is of great importance, must be laid down and stated. Some of these refer to that testimony of the Spirit, which is usually and truly pleaded, as the great ascertaining principle, on account of which we receive the Scriptures to be the word of God.

That the Scripture be received as the word of God, there is required a twofold efficacy of the Spirit. The first respects the subject, or the mind of man, that assents to the authority of the Scripture. Now, concerning this work of the Spirit, by which we are enabled to believe the Scripture, on account of which we may say that we receive the Scripture to be the word of God, or upon the testimony of the Spirit, I shall a little inquire wherein it doth consist.

First, then—It is not an outward or inward vocal testimony concerning the word, as the Papist would impose upon us to believe. We do not affirm that the Spirit immediately saith to every individual believer—this book is, or contains, the word of God; we say not that the Spirit ever speaks to us of the word, but by the word. Such an enthusiasm as they fancy is rarely questioned; and where it is so, it is for the most part quickly discovered to be a delusion. We plead not for the usefulness, much less the necessity, of any such testimony. Yea, the principles we have laid down, resolving all faith into the public testimony of the Scriptures themselves, render all such private testimonies altogether needless.

Secondly—This testimony of the Spirit consists not in a persuasion that a man takes up, he knows not well how or why; only this he knows, he will not depose it though it cost him his life. But if a man should say, that he is persuaded that the Scripture is the word of God, and that he will die a thousand times to give testimony thereto; and not knowing any real ground of this persuasion, that

should bear him out in such a testimony, shall ascribe it to the Spirit of God, our concern lies not in that persuasion. This may befal men by the advantage of traditions, of which men are usually zealous, and obstinate in their defence. Education, in some constitutions, will give pertinacity in most vain and false persuasions. It is not, then, a persuasion induced into our minds, we know not how, built we know not upon what foundations, that we intend, in assigning our receiving the Scripture to be the word of God, to the effectual work and witness of the Holy Ghost.

Two things, then, we intend by this work of the Spirit upon the mind of man :—1. His communication of spiritual light; by an act of his power, enabling the mind to discern the saving truth, majesty, and authority of the word, in a spiritual manner. There is a blindness, a darkness, upon the minds of men, not having the Spirit, that not only disenables them from discerning the things of God, in their certainty, evidence, necessity, and beauty, ("for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God,") but also causes them to judge amiss of them, as things weak, foolish, dark, unintelligible, not answering to any principle of wisdom whereby they are guided. Whilst this delusion abides on the minds of men, it is impossible that they should, on any right abiding foundation, assent to the word of God. They may have a prejudicate opinion, but they have no faith concerning it. This darkness, then, must be removed by the communication of light by the Holy Ghost.

2. The Holy Ghost, together with and by his

work of illumination, taking off the perverse disposition of mind that is in us by nature, with our enmity to, and aversion from, the things of God, also effectually persuades the mind to receive and admit the truth, wisdom, and authority of the word. Now, because this perverse disposition of mind, possessing the supreme command of the soul, influences the will also to an aversion and dislike of that goodness which is in the truth, it is removed by a double act of the Holy Ghost.

(1.) He gives us wisdom, understanding, a spiritual judgment, whereby we may be able to compare spiritual things with spiritual, in a spiritual manner, and to come thereby to a clear and full light of the heavenly excellency and majesty of the word; and so enables us to know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. Under the benefit of this assistance, all the parts of Scripture, in their harmony and correspondency, all the truths of it in their power and necessity, come in together to give evidence one to another, and all of them to the whole; I mean as the mind is enabled to make a spiritual judgment of them.

(2.) He gives a spiritual sense, a taste of the things themselves upon the mind, heart, and conscience, when we have "senses exercised" to discern such things.

As in our natural state, in respect of these things of God, the mind is full of vanity, darkness, blindness, yea, is darkness itself, so that there is no correspondency between the faculty and the object; and the will is in an utter unacquaintedness, yea, impossibility of any acquaintance with the life,

power, savour, sweetness, relish, and goodness, that is in the things proposed to be known under the dark shades of a blind mind: so to remove both these, the Holy Ghost communicates light to the understanding, whence it is able to see and judge of the truth, as it is in Jesus; and the will being thereby delivered from the dungeon wherein it was, and quickened anew, performs its office, in embracing what is proper and suited to it in the object proposed. The Spirit, indeed, discovereth to every one according to the counsel of his will; but yet in that way whereby the sun gives out his light and heat, the former making way for the latter.

Now, by these works of the Spirit, he persuades the mind concerning the truth and authority of the Scripture, and therein leaves an impression of an effectual testimony within us; and this testimony of his, as it is authoritative, and infallible in itself, so it is of inconceivably more efficacy, power, and certainty to those that receive it, than any voice or internal word can be. But yet this is not the work of the Spirit at present inquired after.

2. There is a testimony of the Spirit, that respects the object, or the word itself; and this is a public testimony, which, as it satisfies our souls in particular, so it may be pleaded in reference to the satisfaction of all others to whom the word of God shall come. The Holy Ghost, speaking in and by the word, imparting to it virtue, power, efficacy, majesty, and authority, affords us the witness, that our faith is resolved into. And thus, whereas there are but two heads to which all grounds of assent belong—namely, authority of testimony, and the

self-evidence of truth; they here both concur in one. In the same word we have both the authority of the testimony of the Spirit, and the self-evidence of the truth spoken by him; yea, so that both these are materially one and the same, though distinguished in their formal conceptions. The Spirit's communication of his own light and authority to the Scripture, as evidences of its original, is the testimony pleaded for.

When, then, we resolve our faith into the testimony of the Holy Ghost, it is not any private whisper, word, or voice, given to individual persons; it is not the secret and effectual persuasion of the truth of the Scriptures, that falls upon the minds of some men, from education, tradition, and the like, of which they can give no particular account; it is not the effectual work of the Holy Ghost upon the minds and wills of men, enabling them savingly to believe, that is intended, but it is the public testimony of the Holy Ghost given to the word, by and in the word, and its own divine light, efficacy, and power.

The Scripture, the written word, hath its infallible truth in itself—"Thy word is truth;" from whence it hath its verity and authority; for its whole authority is founded in its truth. Its authority in itself, is its authority in respect of us; nor hath it any whit more in itself, than, in law, it hath over all those to whom it comes; that, in practice, some do not submit themselves to it, is their sin and rebellion. This truth, and consequently this authority, is made known to us, by the public testimony which is given to it by the Holy

Ghost speaking in it, with divine light and power, to the minds, souls, and consciences of men: being therein by itself proposed to us, we being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, (which, in the condition wherein we are, is necessary for the apprehension of any spiritual truth in a spiritual manner,) we receive it, and religiously subject our souls to it, as the word and will of the ever-living, sovereign God, and Judge of all.

Having laid this stable foundation, I shall consider some pretences and allegations for the confirmation of the authority of Scripture, made use of by some to divert us from that foundation, the closing with which will, in this matter alone, bring peace to our souls. I shall, therefore, compare together the testimony of the Spirit before-mentioned, and the other pretences that shall now be examined.

1. Some say, that we have received the Scripture from the church of Rome, who received it by tradition, and this gives a credibility to it. Credibility either keeps within the bounds of probability, or it includes a firm, suitable foundation for faith, supernatural and divine. Have we, in this sense, received the Scripture from that church? Is that church able to give such a credibility to any thing? Or doth the Scripture stand in need of such a credibility to be given to it from that church? Are not the first most false, and is not the last blasphemous? To receive a thing from a church, as a church, is to receive it upon the authority of that church: if we receive any thing from the authority of a church, we do it, not because the thing itself is "worthy of acceptation," but because of the authority alleged.

If, then, we thus receive the Scriptures from the church of Rome, why do we not receive the Apocryphal books also, which she receives? How did the church of Rome receive the Scriptures? Shall we say that she is authorised to give out what seems good to her, as the word of God? No: but she hath received them by tradition; so she pleads, that she hath received the Apocryphal books also: we then receive the Scriptures from Rome; Rome by tradition; we make ourselves judges of that tradition; and yet Rome saith, this is one thing that she hath by the same tradition, namely, that she alone is judge of what she hath by tradition. But the common fate of liars is befallen that harlot: she hath so long, so constantly, so desperately lied in most things that she professeth, pretending tradition for them, that indeed she deserves not to be believed, when she telleth the truth. Besides, she pleads that she received the Scriptures from the beginning, when it is granted that the copies of the Hebrew of the Old, and Greek of the New Testament only were authentic: these she pleads now under her keeping to be wofully corrupted, and yet is angry that we believe not her tradition.

Some add, that we receive the Scripture to be the word of God, on the account of the miracles that were wrought at the giving of the law, and of the New Testament; which miracles we have received by universal tradition. But first, I desire to know whence it comes to pass, that, seeing our Saviour Jesus Christ wrought many other miracles besides those that are written, John xx. 30. xxi. 25. and the apostles likewise, they cannot, by all

their traditions, help us to so much as an obscure report of any one that is not written, (I speak not of legends) which yet, at their performance, were no less known than those that are; nor were less useful for the end of miracles than they. But is it not evident that the miracles of which they speak, are preserved in the Scripture, and no otherwise? And if so, can these miracles operate upon the understanding or judgment of any man, unless they first grant the Scripture to be the word of God; I mean, to the begetting of a divine faith that there were ever any such miracles. Suppose these miracles, alleged as the ground of our believing the word, had not been written, but, like the Sibyl's leaves, had been driven up and down, by the worst and fiercest wind that blows in this world—the breath of man: those who should keep them by tradition, that is, men, are, by nature, so vain, foolish, malicious; such liars, adders, detracters; have spirits and minds so unsuited to spiritual things, so liable to alteration in themselves, and to contradiction one to another; are so given to impostures, and are so apt to be imposed upon; have been so shuffled and driven up and down the world in every generation; have, for the most part, so utterly lost the remembrance of what themselves are, whence they came, or whither they are to go; that I can give very little credit to what I have nothing but their authority to rely upon for, without any evidence from the nature of the thing itself.

Setting aside, then, the testimony given in the Scriptures to the miracles wrought by the prime revealers of the mind and will of God in the word; and no tolerable assurance can be given that ever

any such miracles were wrought. If numbers of men may be allowed to speak, we may have a traditional testimony given to the blasphemous figments of the Koran, under the name of true miracles. But the constant tradition of more than a thousand years, carried on by innumerable multitudes of men, great, wise, and sober, from one generation to another, doth but set open the gates of hell for the Mahometans; yet, setting aside the authority of God in his word, and what is resolved thereinto, I know not why they may not vie in their traditions with the rest of the world. The world, indeed, is full of traditions flowing from the word; that is, a knowledge of the doctrines of the word in the minds of men: but a tradition of the word, not resolved into the word; a tradition referred to seeing and hearing, preserved as an oral law, in a distinct channel and stream by itself, when it is evidenced, either by instance in some particular preserved therein, or in a probability of securing it through the generations passed, by a comparison of some such things of the like kind, I shall be ready to receive it.

Give me, then, as I said before, but the least obscure report of any one of those many miracles that were wrought by our Saviour, and the apostles, which are not recorded in the Scriptures, and I shall put more value on the pretended traditions, than I can as yet persuade myself to. Besides, many writers of the Scripture wrought no miracles, and, by this rule, their writings are left to shift for themselves. Miracles, indeed, were necessary, to take off all prejudices from the persons that brought any

new doctrine from God; but the doctrine still evidenced itself. The apostles converted many, where they wrought no miracles, Acts xvi. 17, 18. and where they did so work, yet they were received for their doctrine, and not the doctrine on their account. And the Scripture now, hath no less evidence and demonstration in itself of its divinity, than it had when it was preached by them.

But because this tradition is pretended with great confidence, as a sure foundation for receiving the Scriptures, I shall a little farther inquire into it. That which, in this case, is intended by tradition, is a report of men, which those who live at present, have received from those that are gone before them. Now, this may be either of all the men of the world, or only of some of them; if of all, either their suffrages must be taken in some convention, or gathered up from the individuals as we are able, and have opportunity. If the first way of receiving them were possible, which is the utmost advantage that imagination can give the authority inquired after, yet every individual of men being a liar, the whole convention must be of the same complexion, and so not be able to yield a sufficient basis to build a faith upon that is infallible, and cannot possibly be deceived.

But now, if this tradition be alleged as preserved only by some in the world, I desire to know, what reason I have to believe those who have that tradition, or plead that they have it, against those who profess they have no such report delivered to them from their forefathers: is the reason of this, because I live among those who have this tradition, and they are my neighbours, whom I know? By the same

rule, those who live among other men are bound to receive what they deliver them upon tradition; and so men may be obliged to believe the Koran to be the word of God.

It is more probable, it will be answered, that their testimony is to be received, because they are the church of God: but it doth not yet appear, that I can, any other way, have knowledge of them so to be, or of any authority that any number of men, more or less, can have in this case, under that name or notion, unless by the Scripture itself; and if so, it will quickly appear what place is to be allotted to their testimony, who cannot be admitted as witnesses, unless the Scripture itself be owned and received; because they have neither plea nor claim to be so admitted, but only from the Scripture. If they shall aver, that they take this honour to themselves, and that, without relation to the Scripture, they claim a right of authoritative witness-bearing in this case, I say again, upon the general grounds of natural reason and equity, I have no more inducements to give credit to their assertions, than to a like number of men holding out a tradition utterly the contrary of what they assert.

But yet, suppose that this also were granted, and that men might be allowed to speak in their own name and authority, giving testimony to themselves, which, upon the hypothesis under consideration, God himself is not allowed to do; I desire to know whether, when the church declares the Scriptures to be the word of God, it doth apprehend any thing in the Scripture as the ground of that judgment and declaration, or not? If it says no; but that it is pro-

posed upon its sole authority; then surely, if we think good to acquiesce in this decision, it is full time for us to lay aside all our studies and inquiries after the mind of God, and seek only what those men say, who are intrusted with this authority; as they say, and as they would have us believe, though we know not at all by what means they came by it; seeing they dare not pretend any thing from the Scripture, lest thereby they direct us to that in the first place.

If it be said, that they do, upon other accounts, judge and believe the Scripture to be the word of God; I suppose it will not be thought unreasonable if we inquire after those grounds, seeing they are of so great concern to us;—all truths, in their relations, consisting in their consonancy and agreement to the nature of things they deliver, I desire to know how they came to judge of the consonancy between the nature of the things delivered in the Scripture, and the delivery of them therein? The things of which we speak, being heavenly, spiritual, mysterious, and supernatural, there cannot be any knowledge obtained of them but by the word itself. How can they form any judgment of the truth of that Scripture, in the relation of these things, which are no where to be known but by that Scripture itself?

If they shall say, that they found their judgment upon some discovery that the Scripture makes of itself to them; they affirm the same that we plead for: only they would very desirously appropriate to themselves the privilege of being able to discern that discovery, so made in the Scripture. To make good this claim, they must either plead somewhat from themselves, or from the Scriptures: if from them-

selves, it can be nothing, but that they see, and all others are blind; being wiser than others, and more able to discern than they. Now, though I shall easily grant them to be very subtle and cunning, yet, that they are so much wiser than all the world besides, as to be entitled to impose upon their belief things which they neither can discern nor know, I would not admit, until I can believe myself, and all others, not of their society, to be beasts of the field, and they as the serpent amongst us.

If it be from the Scripture that they seek to make good this claim, then their plea must be from the promise of some special assistance granted to them for that purpose;—if their assistance be that of the Spirit, it is either of the Spirit that is promised to believers, to work in them as before described, or it is some private testimony which they pretend is afforded to them. If the former be affirmed, we are in a condition, wherein the necessity of devolving all on the Scripture itself, to decide who are believers, lies in every one's view; if the latter, who shall give me assurance, that when they pretend that witness and testimony, they do not lie and deceive? we must here, certainly, go either to the Scripture, or to some cunning man to be resolved, Isa. viii. 19, 20.

I confess the argument, which hath been dexterously managed, by an able and learned pen, namely, of proving the truth of the doctrine of the Scripture from the truth of the story, and the truth of the story, from the certainty there is that the writers of the books of the Bible were those persons whose names they bear, so pursuing the evidence, that what they wrote was true and known to them so

to be, from all requisites that may possibly be sought after, for the strengthening of such evidence, is of great force and efficacy. It is, I say, of great force and efficacy as to the end for which it is insisted on; that is, to satisfy men's rational inquiries; but as to a ground of faith, it hath the same insufficiency with all other arguments of the like kind. Though I should grant that the apostles and penmen of the Scripture were persons of the greatest honesty, integrity, faithfulness, holiness, that ever lived in the world—as they really were; and that they wrote nothing, but what themselves had as good assurance of, as men, by their senses of seeing and hearing, are able to attain; yet such a knowledge and assurance is not a sufficient foundation for the faith of the church of God;—if they received not every word by inspiration, and that evidencing itself to us, otherwise than by the authority of their integrity, it can be no foundation for us to build our faith upon.

Before the committing of the Scriptures to writing, God had given the world an experiment, what keepers men were of this revelation by tradition; within some hundreds of years after the flood, all knowledge of him, through the craft of Satan, and the vanity of the minds of men, was so lost, that nothing, but as it were the creation of a new world, or the erection of a new church-state, by new revelations, could restore it. After that great trial, what can be farther pretended, on the behalf of tradition, I know not.

The sum of all is; the merciful good providence of God having, by various means—using therein, amongst other things, the ministry of men and

churches—preserved the writings of the Old and New Testament in the world; and by the same gracious disposal preserved them to us, they are received and submitted to by us, upon the grounds and evidences of their own divine original.

Upon the whole matter, then, I would know, whether, if the Scriptures should be brought to any man, where he could not possibly have it attested to be the word of God, by any authority of man or church, tradition or otherwise, he were bound to believe it or not? whether he should obey God in believing, or sin in rejecting it? Suppose he do but take it into consideration, do but give it the reading or hearing, seeing in every place it avers itself to be the word of God, he must of necessity either give credit to it, or disbelieve it; to hang in suspense, which ariseth from the imperfect acting of the faculties of the soul, is in itself a weakness, and in this case being reckoned on the worst side, is interpretatively a rejection. If you say, it were the duty of such a one to believe it, you acknowledge in the Scripture itself a sufficient evidence of its own original authority; without which it can be no man's duty to believe it. If you say, it would not be his sin to reject it, to disbelieve all that it speaks in the name of God; then you say, God may truly and really speak to a man, (as he doth by the Scripture,) and yet that man not be bound to believe him. We deal not thus with one another.

To wind up then the plea insisted on, in the foregoing chapter, concerning the self-evidencing light and power of the Scripture, and to make way for some other considerations, that tend to the confirma-

tion of their divine original, I shall close this discourse with two general considerations.

1. Then, laying aside these defective pleas, there seems to be a moral impossibility that the word of God should not manifest its own original and authority. There is no work of God but reveals its author. A curious artificer imparts that of form, shape, proportion, and comeliness, to the fruit of his invention, and work of his hands, that every one that looks upon it, must conclude, that it comes from skill and ability. A man in the delivery of his mind, in the writing of a book, will give it such an impression of reason, that though you cannot conclude that this or that man wrote it, yet you must conclude, that it was the product of a man, or rational creature; yea, some individual men of excellency in some skill, are instantly known by the effects of their skill. How easy is it for those who are conversant about ancient authors, to discover an author by the spirit and style of his writings. Now, certainly this is strange beyond all belief, that almost every agent should give an impress to its work, by which it may be appropriated to him, and the word of God only, wherein it was the design of the great and holy God, to give us a portraiture of his wisdom, holiness, and goodness, so far as we are capable of an acquaintance with him in this life, is not able to declare and evince its original. That God, who is the first and sovereign truth, infinitely separated and distinguished, on all accounts, from all creatures, should write a book, or, at least, immediately indite it, commanding us to receive it as his, under the penalty of his eternal displeasure, and

yet that book not make a sufficient discovery of itself to be his, and from him, is past all belief. Let men that live on things received by tradition from their fathers, who, perhaps, never had the sense of any real transaction between God and their souls, who scarcely ever perused the word seriously in their lives, nor brought their consciences to it, please themselves in their own imaginations; the sure anchor of a soul that would draw nigh to God, in and by his word, lies in its self-evidencing authority.

I suppose it will not be denied, but that it was the will of God, that those to whom his word should come, should own it and receive it as his; if not, it were no sin in those to reject it, to whom it doth so come; if it were, then, either he hath given those characters to it, and left upon it that impression of his majesty, by which it might be known to be his, or he hath not done so; and that either because he *would* not, or because he *could* not. To say the latter, is to make him more infirm than a man, or other worms of the earth. He that saith the former, must know, that it is incumbent on him to yield a satisfactory account, why God *would* not do so, or else he will be thought blasphemously to impute a want of that goodness and love of mankind to God, which he hath, in infinite grace, manifested to be in himself. That no man is able to assign any such reason, I shall firmly believe, until I find some attempting so to do; which, as yet, none have arrived at that height of impudence and wickedness as to own.

2. How horrible is it to the thoughts of any

saint of God, that the Scripture should not have its authority from itself. Were it otherwise, the Scripture must stand to the mercy of man for the reputation of its divinity; nay, of its verity; for whence it hath its authority, thence it also hath its verity.

CHAPTER VI.

Consequential considerations for the confirmation of the divine authority of the Scripture.

As some may happily be kept to some kind of adherence to the Scriptures, by lower grounds, until they get footing in those that are more firm, I shall insist on two of that kind, which, to me, seem not only to persuade, and, in a great measure, to convince, but also to prevail irresistibly, on the understanding of unprejudiced men, to close with the divine truth of it.

The first of these is taken from the nature of the doctrine itself, contained in the Scripture, the second from the management of the whole design therein; the first is innate, the other of a more external and rational consideration.

For the first of them, there are two things to be considered in the doctrine of the Scripture, that are powerful, and, if I may so say, uncontrollably prevalent as to this purpose.

First, Its universal suitableness, upon its first clear discovery, to all the entanglements and perplexities of the souls of men, in reference to their relation to, and dependence upon God. If all man-

kind have certain entanglements upon their hearts and spirits, in reference to God, which none of them that are not utterly brutish do not wrestle with, and which all of them are not able, in the least, to satisfy themselves about, certainly that doctrine which is suited universally to satisfy all their perplexities, to calm and quiet their spirits in all their tumultuatings, and doth break in upon them, in its discovery, with a glorious efficacy to that purpose, must needs be from that God with whom we have to do, and none else. From whom else, I pray, should it be.

Now, there are three things, that every one of mankind, not naturally brutish, are perplexed with, in reference to their dependence on God, and relation to him.

1. How they may worship him as they ought.

2. How they may be reconciled, and at peace with him, or have an atonement for that guilt of which they are naturally sensible.

3. What is the nature of true blessedness, and how they may attain it, or how they may come to the enjoyment of God.

That all mankind is perplexed and entangled about these considerations—that all men ever were so, without exception, more or less, and continue so to be to this day—that of themselves, they miserably grope in the dark, and are never able to come to any satisfaction, neither as to what is present, nor as to what is to come, I could manifest from the state, office, and condition of conscience, and the indelible innate ideas and presumptions about them, that are in the hearts of all by nature. The whole history of all religion which hath been in the world,

with the design of all ancient and present philosophy, do manifest this truth.

That surely, then, which shall administer to every one of them, universally, satisfaction as to all these things, to quiet their spirits, to cut off all necessity of any further inquiries, give them that wherewith they will be satisfied, unless they will cast off that relation and dependence on God, which they seek to settle,—surely, I say, this must be from the all-seeing, all-satisfying truth, and from none else. Now this is done by the doctrine of the Scripture, with such a glorious uncontrollable conviction, that every one to whom it is revealed, the eyes of whose understanding are not blinded by the god of this world, must needs cry out, I have found that which in vain I sought elsewhere in my foolish imaginations.

Take an instance in the business of atonement, reconciliation, and acceptance with God. What strange horrible fruits have men's contrivances produced on this occasion? What have they not invented? What have they not suffered, and yet continued in dread and bondage all their days? Now, with what a glorious soul-appeasing light doth the doctrine of satisfaction and atonement, by the blood of Christ, the Son of God, come in upon such men! This first astonisheth, then conquereth, then ravisheth, and satiateth the soul. This is what they looked for, were sick for, and knew it not. This is the design of the Apostle's discourse in the three first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. Let any man read that discourse, from chap. i. 18. and onward, and he will see with what glory and

beauty, with what ample satisfaction this doctrine breaks out.

It is no otherwise as to present worship, or future blessedness. This meets with men in all their wanderings, stops them in their disquisitions, convinces them of the darkness, uncertainty, falseness of all their reasonings about these things; and that with such an evidence and light, as at once subdues them, captivates their understanding, and quiets their souls.

Of what hath been spoken, this is the sum. All mankind that acknowledge their dependence upon God, and relation to him, are naturally grievously perplexed in their hearts, thoughts, and reasonings about the worship of God, acceptance with him, and the future enjoyment of him; some are exercised with more clear and distinct apprehensions of these things; some under more dark and general notions of them. To extricate themselves, and to come to some issue about these inquiries, hath been the great design of their lives, the aim they had in all things they did. Notwithstanding which, they were never able to deliver themselves, no not one of them, or attain satisfaction to their souls, but waxed vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were more and more darkened. In this state of things, the doctrine of the Scripture, coming in with full, unquestionable satisfaction, suited to the inquirings of every individual soul, with a largeness of wisdom and depth of goodness not to be fathomed, it must needs be from that God with whom we have to do. And those who are not persuaded of this, that will not cast anchor in this harbour, let them put to sea

once more, if they dare, and try if all their perplexities do not inevitably return.

There are some doctrines of the Scripture, some revelations in it, so sublimely glorious, of so profound and mysterious an excellency, that, at the first proposal of them, nature startles, meeting with that which is above it, too great and too excellent for it, which it could desirously avoid and decline; but yet, gathering itself up to them, it yields, and finds that unless they are accepted and submitted to, though unsearchable, not only all that hath been received must be rejected, but also the whole dependence of the creature on God be dissolved, or rendered only dreadful and destructive to nature itself. Such are the doctrines of the Trinity, of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the resurrection of the dead, of the new birth, and the like. At the first revelation of these things, nature is amazed, cries, How can these things be? Or gathers up itself to opposition—this is babbling, like the Athenians; folly, as the wise Greeks. But when the eyes of reason are a little confirmed, though it can never clearly behold the glory of this sun, yet it confesseth a glory to be in it, above all that it is able to apprehend. These doctrines, though great, above and beyond the reach of reason, yet upon search are found to be such, as, without submission to them, the whole comfortable relation between God and man must needs be dissolved.

Let us take a view in our way of one of the instances. What is there in the whole book of God, that nature at first sight, doth more recoil at, than the doctrine of the Trinity? How many do yet

stumble and fall at it? I confess the doctrine itself is but sparingly, yet it is clearly and distinctly delivered unto us in the Scripture. Here reason is entangled; yet, after a while, finds evidently, that, unless this be embraced, all other things wherein it hath to do with God, will not be of value to the soul. This will quickly be made to appear. Of all that communion which is here between God and man, founded on the revelation of his mind and will to him, which makes way for his enjoyment in glory, there are these two parts:—1. God's gracious communication of his love, goodness, &c., with the fruits of them to man. 2. The obedience of man to God, in a way of gratitude for that love, according to the mind of God revealed to him. These two comprise the whole of the intercourse between God and man. Now, when the mind of man is exercised about these things, he finds at last that they are so wrapped up in the doctrine of the Trinity, that without the belief and acceptance of it, it is utterly impossible that any interest in them should be obtained or preserved.

For the first, or the communication of God to us in a way of love and goodness, it is wholly founded upon, and inwrapped in this truth, both as to the eternal spring and actual execution of it. A few instances will evince this assertion. The eternal fountain of all grace, flowing from love and goodness, lies in God's election. This being an act of God's will, cannot be apprehended, but as an eternal act of his wisdom or word also. All the eternal thoughts of its execution, lie in the covenant that was between the Father and the Son, as to the Son's undertaking to execute that purpose of his.

Take away then the doctrine of the Trinity, and both these are gone. There can be no purpose of grace by the Father in the Son, no covenant for the putting of that purpose in execution; and so the foundation of all the fruits of love and goodness is lost to the soul.

As to the execution of this purpose, with the actual dispensation of the fruits of grace and goodness to us, it lies wholly in the unspeakable condescension of the Son in his incarnation, with what ensued thereon. The incarnation of the eternal Word, by the power of the Holy Ghost, is the ground of our participation of grace. Without it, it was absolutely impossible that man should be made partaker of the favour of God. Now this inwraps the whole doctrine of the Trinity in its bosom; nor can once be apprehended, without its acknowledgment. Deny the Trinity, and all this means of the communication of grace, with the whole of the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ, falls to the ground. Every tittle of it speaks this truth: and they who deny the one, reject the other.

Our actual participation of the fruits of this grace, is by the Holy Ghost. We cannot ourselves seize on them, nor bring them home to our own souls. Now whence is this Holy Ghost? Is he not sent from the Father by the Son? Can we entertain any thought of his effectual working in us, but it includes this whole doctrine? They, therefore, who deny the Trinity, deny the efficacy of its operation also.

So it is, as to our obedience to God, by which the communion between God and man is completed.

alone. If it be not so, it must be acknowledged that the author of it had a blasphemous design to hold forth himself to be God, when he is not so; a malicious design to deceive the sons of men, and to make them believe that they worship and honour God, and obey him when they do not; and thus draw them into everlasting destruction;—and that to compass these ends of blasphemy, atheism, and malice, he hath laid out, in a long course of time, all the industry and wisdom that a creature could be made partaker of. Now he that should do thus, must be the devil, and none else; no other creature can possibly arrive at that height of obstinacy in evil. Now certainly, whilst God is pleased to continue to us any thing, by which we are distinguished from the beasts that perish; whilst there is a sense of the difference between good and evil, abiding amongst men; it cannot fall upon the understanding of any man, that that doctrine which is so holy and pure, so absolutely leading to the utmost improvement of whatever is good, just, commendable, and praise-worthy, so suitable to all the light of God, of good and evil that remains in us, could proceed from any one everlastingly hardened in evil, and that in the pursuit of the most wicked design, that that wicked one could possibly be engaged in; namely, to enthrone himself, and maliciously to cheat and ruin the souls of men; so that upon necessity the Scripture can own no author but Him, whose it is, even the living God.

ON THE

FOLLY AND DANGER

OF

MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST.

BY

RICHARD BAXTER.

ON

MAKING LIGHT OF CHRIST.

MATTHEW XXII. 2—5.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise."

THE blessed Son of God, that thought it not enough to die for the world, but would himself also be the preacher of grace and salvation, doth comprise in this parable the sum of his Gospel. By the king that is here said to make the marriage, is meant God the Father, that sent his Son into the world to cleanse them from their sins, and espouse them to himself. By his Son, for whom the marriage is made, is meant the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who took to his Godhead the nature of man, that he might be capable of being their Redeemer, when they had lost themselves in sin. By the marriage is meant the conjunction of Christ to the soul of sinners, when he giveth up himself to them to be their Sa-

viour, and they give up themselves to him as his redeemed ones, to be saved and ruled by him; the perfection of which marriage will be at the day of judgment, when the conjunction between the whole church and Christ shall be solemnized. The word here translated "marriage," rather signifieth the marriage-feast; and the meaning is, that the world is invited by the Gospel to come in and partake of Christ and salvation, which comprehendeth pardon, justification, and right to salvation, and all other privileges of the members of Christ. The invitation is God's offer of Christ and salvation in the Gospel; the servants that invite them are the preachers of the Gospel, who are sent forth by God for that end; the preparation for the feast there mentioned, is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and the enacting of a law of grace, and opening a way for revolting sinners to return to God. There is a mention made of sending second messengers, because God useth not to take the first denial, but to exercise his patience till sinners are obstinate. The first persons invited are the Jews; upon their obstinate refusal they are sentenced to punishment; and the Gentiles are invited, and not only invited, but by powerful preaching, and miracles, and effectual grace compelled; that is, infallibly prevailed on to come in. The number of them is so great, that the house is filled with the guests: many come sincerely, not only looking at the pleasure of the feast, that is, at the pardon of sin, and deliverance from the wrath of God, but also at the honour of the marriage, that is, of the Redeemer, and their profession by giving up themselves to a holy conversation; but some come in

only for the feast, that is, justification by Christ, having not the wedding garment of sound resolution for obedience in their life, and looking only at themselves in believing, and not to the glory of their Redeemer; and these are sentenced to everlasting misery, and speed as ill as those that came not in at all; seeing a faith that will not work is but like that of the devil; and they that look to be pardoned and saved by it are mistaken, as James showeth, chap. ii. 24.

The words of my text contain a narration of the ill entertainment that the Gospel findeth with many to whom it is sent, even after a first and second invitation. They made light of it, and are taken up with other things. Though it be the Jews that were first guilty, they have too many followers among us Gentiles to this day.

Doct.—For all the wonderful love and mercy that God hath manifested in giving his Son to be the Redeemer of the world, and which the Son hath manifested in redeeming them by his blood; for all his full preparation by being a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all; for all his personal excellencies, and that full and glorious salvation that he hath procured; and for all his free offers of these, and frequent and earnest invitation of sinners; yet many do make light of all this, and prefer their worldly enjoyments before it. The ordinary entertainment of all is by contempt.

Not that all do so, or that all continue to do so, who were once guilty of it; for God hath chosen whom he will compel to come in. But till the Spirit of grace overpower the dead and obstinate

hearts of men, they hear the Gospel as a common story, and the great matters contained in it go not to the heart.

The method in which I shall handle this doctrine is this.

I. I shall show you what it is that men make light of.

II. What this sin of making light of it is.

III. The cause of the sin.

IV. The use of the doctrine.

I. The thing that carnal hearers make light of is, 1. The doctrine of the Gospel itself, which they hear regardlessly. 2. The benefits offered them therein: which are, 1. Christ himself. 2. The benefits which he giveth.

Concerning Christ himself, the Gospel declareth his person and nature, and the great things that he hath done and suffered for man: his redeeming him from the wrath of God by his blood, and procuring a grant of salvation with himself. Furthermore, the same Gospel maketh an offer of Christ to sinners, that if they will accept him on his easy and reasonable terms, he will be their Saviour, the physician of their souls, their husband, and their head.

The benefits that he offereth them are these. 1. That with these blessed relations to himself and interest in him, they shall have the pardon of all their sins, and be saved from God's wrath. 2. They shall have the Spirit to become their guide and sanctifier, and to dwell in their souls, and help them against their enemies, and conform them more and more to his image, and heal their diseases, and bring them back to God. 3. They shall have right to

everlasting glory when this life is ended, besides many excellent privileges in the way, in means, preservation, and provision, and the foretaste of what they shall enjoy hereafter: all these benefits the Gospel offereth to them that will have Christ on his reasonable terms. The sum of all is, "This is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life."

II. What this sin of the making light of the Gospel is. 1. To make light of the Gospel is to take no great heed to what is spoken, as if it were not a certain truth, or else were a matter that little concerned them; or as if God had not written these things for them. 2. When the Gospel doth not affect men, or go to their hearts; but though they seem to attend to what is said, yet men are not awakened by it from their security, nor doth it work in any measure such holy passion in their souls, as matters of such everlasting consequence should do; this is making light of the Gospel of salvation. When we tell men what Christ hath done and suffered for their souls, it scarcely moveth them. We tell them of keen and cutting truths, but nothing will pierce them. We can make them hear, but we cannot make them feel; our words take up in their ears and fancies, but will not enter into the inward parts: as if we spake to men that had no hearts or feeling; this is a making light of Christ and salvation: "Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For the heart of this people is waxen gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes are closed," &c.

3. When men have no high estimation of Christ and salvation, but whatsoever they may say with their tongues, or dreamingly and speculatively believe, yet, in their serious and practical thoughts, they have a higher estimation of the matters of this world, than they have of Christ, and the salvation that he hath purchased; this is a making light of him. When men account the doctrine of Christ to be but a matter of words and names, as Gallio or Festus, "a superstitious matter about one Jesus who was dead, and Paul saith is alive;" or ask the preachers of the Gospel, as the Athenians, "What will this babbler say?"—this is contempt of Christ.

4. When men are informed of the truths of the Gospel, and on what terms Christ and his benefits may be had, and that it is the will of God that they should believe and accept the offer; and he commandeth them to do it upon pain of damnation; and yet men will not consent, unless they have Christ on terms of their own. They will not part with their worldly contents, nor lay down their pleasures, and profits, and honour at his feet, as being content to take so much of them only as he will give them back, and as is consistent with his will and interest, but think it is a hard saying, that they must forsake all for Christ; this is a making light of him and their salvation. When men might have part in him and all his benefits if they would, and they will not, unless they may keep the world too; and are resolved to please their flesh, whatever comes of it; this is a high contempt of Christ and everlasting life. In Matt. xiii. 21, 22. Luke xviii. 23. you may find examples of such as I here describe.

5. When men will promise fair, and profess their willingness to have Christ on his terms, and to forsake all for him, but yet do stick to the world and their sinful courses; and when it comes to practice, will not be moved by all that Christ hath done and said: this is making light of Christ and salvation.

III. The causes of this sin are the next thing to be inquired after. It may seem a wonder that ever men, that have the use of their reason, should be so sottish as to make light of matters of such consequence. But the cause is,

1. Some men understand not the very sense of the words of the Gospel when they hear it, and how can they be taken with that which they understand not? Though we speak to them in plain English, and study to speak it as plain as we can, yet people have so estranged themselves from God, and the matters of their own happiness, that they know not what we say, as if we spoke in another language, and as if they were under that judgment, "With stammering lips, and with another tongue will he speak to this people."

2. Some that do understand the words that we speak, yet because they are carnal, understand not the matter. For the "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." They are earthly, and these things are heavenly. These things of the Spirit are not well known by bare hearsay, but by spiritual taste, which none have but those that are taught by the Holy Ghost, that we may know the things that are given us of God.

3. A carnal mind apprehendeth not a suitableness in these spiritual and heavenly things to his mind, and therefore he sets light by them. When you tell him of everlasting glory, he heareth you as if you were persuading him to go play with the sun; they are matters of another world, and out of his element. They may be good to others, but he cannot apprehend them as suitable to him, because he hath a nature that is otherwise inclined; he savoureth not the things of the Spirit.

4. The main cause of the slighting of Christ and salvation, is a secret root of unbelief in men's hearts. Whatever they may pretend, they do not soundly and thoroughly believe the word of God. They are taught in general to say the Gospel is true; but they never saw the evidence of its truth so far, as thoroughly to persuade them of it; nor have they got their souls settled on the infallibility of God's testimony, nor considered the truth of the particular doctrines revealed in the Scripture, as soundly to believe them. O did you all but soundly believe the words of this Gospel; of the evil of sin, of the need of Christ, and what he hath done for you, and what you must be and do if ever you will be saved by him; and what will become of you for ever if you do it not; I dare say it would cure the contempt of Christ, and you would not make so light of the matters of your salvation. But men do not believe, while they say they do. There is a root of bitterness, and an evil heart of unbelief, that makes them depart from the living God. Tell any man in this congregation, that he shall have a gift of ten thousand pounds, if he will go to London for it; if he

believe you, he will go; but if he believe not, he will not; and if he will not go, you may be sure he believeth not. I know a slight belief may stand with a wicked life: such as men have of the truth of a prognostication, it may be true, and it may be false; but a true and sound belief is not consistent with so great neglect of the things that are believed.

5. Christ and salvation are made light of by the world, because of their desperate hardness of heart. The heart is hard naturally, and by custom in sinning made more hard, especially by long abuse of mercy, and neglect of the means of grace, and resisting the Spirit of God. Hence it is that men are turned into such stones: and, till God cure them of the stony heart, no wonder if they feel not what they know, or regard not what we say, but make light of all. When men's hearts are like the highway, trodden to hardness by long custom in sinning, or like the clay that is hardened to a stone, by the heat of those mercies that should have melted them into repentance: when they have consciences seared with a hot iron, as the Apostle speaks; no wonder, then, if they be past feeling, and working all uncleanness with greediness, do make light of Christ and everlasting glory. O that this were not the case of too many of our hearers! Had we but *living souls* to speak to, they would hear, and feel, and not make light of what we say. I know they are naturally alive, but they are spiritually dead. O if there were but one spark of the life of grace in them, the doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ, would appear to them to be the weightiest business in the world! O how

confident should I be, methinks, to prevail with men, and to take them off this world, and bring them to mind the matters of another world, if I spake but to men that had life, and sense, and reason! But when we speak to dead men, how should we be regarded! O how sad a case are these souls in, that are fallen under this fearful judgment of spiritual madness and deadness! To have a blind mind, and a hard heart, to be sottish and senseless, lest they should be converted, and their sin should be forgiven them.

6. Christ and salvation are made light of by the world, because they are wholly enslaved to their sense, and taken up with lower things. The matters of another world are out of sight, and so far from their senses, that they cannot regard them; but present things are nearer them, in their eyes, and in their hands. There must be a living faith to prevail over sense, before men can be so taken with things that are not seen, though they have the word of God for their security, as to neglect and let go things that are still before their eyes. Sense works with great advantage, and, therefore, doth much in resisting faith where it is. No wonder, then, if it carry all before it, where there is no true and lively faith to resist, to lead the soul to higher things. This cause of making light of Christ and salvation, is expressed here in my text: "One went to his farm, and another to his merchandise." Men have houses and lands to look after; they have wives and children to mind; they have their body and outward estate to regard, therefore they forget that they have a God, a Redeemer, a soul to mind; these

matters of the world are still with them. They see these, but they see not God, nor Christ, nor their souls, nor everlasting glory. These things are near at hand, and therefore work naturally, and so work forcibly; but the other are thought on as a great way off, and, therefore, too distant to work on their affections, or be at the present so much regarded by them. Their body hath life and sense, therefore if they want meat, or drink, or clothes, will feel their want, and tell them of it, and give them no rest till their wants be supplied, and, therefore, they cannot make light of their bodily necessities; but their souls, in spiritual respects, are dead, and, therefore, feel not their wants, but will let them alone in their greatest necessities; and be as quiet when they are starved and languishing to destruction, as if all were well, and nothing ailed them. And, hereupon, poor people are wholly taken up in providing for the body, as if they had nothing else to mind. They have their trades and callings to follow, and so much to do from morning to night, that they can find no time for matters of salvation. Christ would teach them, but they have no leisure to hear him: the Bible is before them, but they cannot have time to read it: a minister is in the town with them, but they cannot have time to go to inquire of him, what they should do to be saved: and when they do hear, their hearts are so full of the world, and carried away with these lower matters, that they cannot mind the things which they hear. They are so full of the thoughts, and desires, and cares of this world, that there is no room to pour into them the water of life: "The cares of the world do choke the word, and make it

become unfruitful:" "Men cannot serve two masters, God and mammon; but they will lean to the one, and despise the other:" "He that loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Men cannot but set light by Christ and salvation, while they set so much by any thing on earth: it is "that which is highly esteemed among men, that is abominable in the sight of God." O this is the ruin of many thousand souls! It would grieve the heart of any honest Christian, to see how eagerly this vain world is followed every where, and how little men set by Christ, and the world to come; to compare the care that men have for the world, with the care of their souls; and the time that they lay out on the world, with that time they lay out for their salvation. To see how the world fills their mouths, their hands, their houses, their hearts, and Christ hath little more than a bare title. To come into their company, and hear no discourse but of the world; to come into their houses, and hear and see nothing but for the world, as if this world would last for ever, or would purchase them another. When I sometimes ask the ministers of the Gospel how their labours succeed, they tell me, "People continue still the same, and give up themselves wholly to the world; so that they mind not what ministers say to them, nor will give any full entertainment to the word, and all because of the deluding world." And O that too many ministers themselves did not make light of that Christ whom they preach, being drawn away with the love of this world! In a word, men of a worldly disposition, judge of things according to worldly advantages, therefore Christ is slighted; "He is

despised and rejected of men, they hide their faces from him, and esteem him not, as seeing no beauty or comeliness in him, that they should desire him."

7. Christ and salvation are made light of, because men do not soberly consider of the truth and weight of these necessary things. They suffer not their minds so long to dwell upon them, till they procure a due esteem, and deeply affect their heart; did they believe them, and not consider of them, how should they work! O when men have reason given them, to think and consider of the things that most concern them, and yet they will not use it, this causeth their contempt.

8. Christ and salvation are made light of, because men were never sensible of their sin and misery, and extreme necessity of Christ and his salvation; their eyes were never opened to see themselves as they are; nor their hearts soundly humbled in the sense of their condition: if this were done, they would soon be brought to value a Saviour. A truly broken heart can no more make light of Christ and salvation, than a hungry man of his food, or a sick man of the means that would give ease: but till then our words cannot have access to their hearts. While sin and misery are made light of, Christ and salvation will be made light of: but when these are perceived to be an intolerable burden, then nothing will serve the turn but Christ. Till men be truly humbled, they can venture Christ and salvation for a lust, for a little worldly gain, even for less than nothing: but when God hath illuminated them, and broken their hearts, then they would give a world for Christ; then they must have Christ or they die; all things then are

loss and dung to them in regard of the excellent knowledge of Christ. When they are once pricked in their hearts for sin and misery, then they cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" When they are awakened by God's judgments, as the poor jailor, then they cry out, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?" This is the reason why God will bring men so low by humiliation, before he brings them to salvation.

9. Men take occasion to make light of Christ by the commonness of the Gospel; because they hear of it every day, the frequency is an occasion to dull their affections; I say, an occasion, for it is no just cause. Were it a rarity, it might take more with them; but now, if they hear a minister preach nothing but these saving truths, they say, "We have these every day." They make not light of their bread or drink, their health or life, because they possess them every day; they make not light of the sun because it shineth every day; but Christ and salvation are made light of because they hear of them often. "This is," say they, "a good, plain, dry sermon." Pearls are undervalued where they are common; they loathe this dry manna: "The full soul loathes the honey-comb; but to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet."

10. Christ and salvation are made light of, because of this disjunctive presumption; either that he is sure enough theirs already, and God that is so merciful, and Christ that hath suffered so much for them, is surely resolved to save them; or else it may easily be obtained at any time, if it be not yet so. A conceited facility to have a part in Christ and

salvation at any time, doth occasion men to make light of them. It is true, that grace is free, and the offer is universal, according to the extent of the preaching of the Gospel; and it is true, that men may have Christ when they will; that is, when they are willing to have him on his terms; but He that hath promised thee Christ, if thou be willing, hath not promised to make thee willing: and if thou art not willing now, how canst thou think thou shalt be willing hereafter? If thou canst make thine own heart willing, why is it not done now? Can you do it better when sin hath more hardened it, and God may have given thee over to thyself? O sinners! you might do much, though you are not able of yourselves to come in, if you would now subject yourselves to the working of the Spirit, and set in while the gales of grace continue: but did you know what a hard and impossible thing it is to be so much as willing to have Christ and grace, when the heart is given over to itself, and the Spirit hath withdrawn its former invitations, you would not be so confident of your own strength to believe and repent; nor would you make light of Christ upon such foolish confidence. If, indeed, it be so easy a matter as you imagine, for a sinner to believe and repent at any time, how comes it to pass that it is done by so few; but most of the world do perish in their impenitency, when they have all the helps and means that we can afford them? It is true, the thing is very reasonable and easy in itself to a pure nature; but, while man is blind and dead, these things are in a way impossible to him, which are never so easy to others. It is the easiest and sweetest life in the world to a gracious soul to

live in the love of God, and the delightful thoughts of the life to come, where all their hope and happiness lieth: but to a worldly, carnal heart, it is as easy to remove a mountain as to bring them to this. However, these men are their own condemners; for, if they think it so easy a matter to repent and believe, and so to have Christ, and right to salvation, then have they no excuse for neglecting this which they thought so easy. O wretched, impenitent soul! what mean you to say when God shall ask you, Why did you not repent, and love your Redeemer above the world, when you thought it so easy that you could do it at any time!

IV. *Use* 1. We come now to the application: and hence, you may be informed of the blindness and folly of all carnal men. How contemptible are their judgments that think Christ and salvation contemptible! And how little reason there is why any should be moved by them, or discouraged by any of their scorns and contradictions!

How shall we sooner know a man to be a fool, than if he know no difference between dung and gold? Is there such a thing as madness in the world, if that man be not mad that sets light by Christ, and his own salvation, while he daily toils for the dung of the earth? And yet, what pity is it to see that a company of poor, ignorant souls will be ashamed of godliness, if such men as these do but deride them! Or, will think hardly of a holy life, if such as these do speak against it! Hearers, if you see any set light by Christ and salvation, do you set light by that man's wit, and by his words; and hear the reproaches of a holy life, as you would

hear the words of a madman—not with regard, but with a compassion of his misery.

Use 2. What wonder if we and our preaching be despised, and the best ministers complain of ill success, when the ministry of the apostles themselves did succeed no better! What wonder, if for all that we can say or do, our hearers still set light by Christ and their own salvation, when the apostles' hearers did the same! They that did second their doctrine by miracles: if any men could have shaken and torn in pieces the hearts of sinners, they could have done it. If any man could have laid them at their feet, and made them all cry out as some, "What shall we do?" it would have been they. You may see then, that it is not merely for want of good preachers that men make light of Christ and salvation. The first news of such a thing as the pardon of sin, and the hopes of glory, and the danger of everlasting misery, would turn the hearts of men within them, if they were as tractable in spiritual matters as in temporal: but, alas! it is far otherwise. It must not seem any strange thing, nor must it too much discourage the preachers of the Gospel, if, when they have said all that they can devise to say, to win the hearts of men to Christ; the most do still slight him, and while they bow the knee to him, and honour him with their lips, do yet set so light by him in their hearts, as to prefer every fleshly pleasure or convenience before him. It will be thus with many: let us be glad that it is not thus with all.

Use 3. But for closer application, seeing this is the great condemning sin, before we inquire after it into the hearts of our hearers, it beseems us to begin

at home, and see that we, who are preachers of the Gospel, be not guilty of it ourselves. The Lord forbid that they that have undertaken the sacred office of revealing the excellencies of Christ to the world, should make light of him themselves, and slight that salvation which they daily preach. The Lord knows we are all of us so low in our estimation of Christ, and do this great work so negligently, that we have cause to be ashamed of our best sermons; but should this sin prevail in us, we were the most miserable of all men. O that there were no cause to complain that Christ and salvation are made light of by the preachers of it! But, 1. Do not the negligent studies of some speak it out? 2. Doth not their dead and drowsy preaching declare it? Do not they make light of the doctrine they preach, that do it as if they were half asleep, and feel not what they speak themselves? 3. Doth not the carelessness of some men's private endeavours discover it? what do they for souls? how slightly do they reprove sin? How little do they when they are out of the pulpit for the saving of men's souls! 4. Doth not the continued neglect of those things, wherein the interest of Christ consisteth, discover it? 1st, The church's purity and reformation. 2d, Its unity. 5. Doth not the covetous and worldly lives of too many discover it, losing advantages for men's souls, for a little gain to themselves? And most of this is because men are preachers before they are Christians, and tell men of that which they never felt themselves. Of all men on earth, there are few that are in so sad a condition as such ministers; and if indeed they do believe that Scripture which

they preach, methinks it should be terrible to them in their studying and preaching it.

Use 4. Beloved hearers, the office that God hath called us to, is by declaring the glory of his grace, to help, under Christ, to the saving of men's souls. I hope you think not that I come hither to-day, on any other errand. The Lord knows, I had not set a foot out of doors, but in hope to succeed in this work for your souls. I have considered, and often considered, What is the matter, that so many thousands should perish when God hath done so much for their salvation; and I find this that is mentioned in my text is the cause. It is one of the wonders of the world, that when God hath so loved the world as to send his Son, and Christ hath made a satisfaction, by his death, sufficient for them all, and offereth the benefits of it so freely to them, even without money or price, that yet the most of the world should perish; yea, the most of those that are thus called by his word! Why, here is the reason, when Christ hath done all this, men make light of it. God hath showed that he is not unwilling; and Christ hath showed that he is not unwilling that men should be restored to God's favour, and be saved; but men are actually unwilling themselves. God takes not pleasure in the death of sinners, but rather that they return and live. But men take such pleasure in sin, that they will die before they will return. The Lord Jesus was content to be their physician, and hath provided them a sufficient remedy in his own blood; but if men make light of it, and will not apply it, what wonder if they perish after all! This Scripture

giveth us the reason of their perdition. This sad experience tells us, the most of the world is guilty of. It is a most lamentable thing, to see how most men do spend their care, their time, their pains, for known vanities, while God and glory are cast aside: that he who is all should seem to them as nothing; and that which is nothing should seem to them as good as all: that God should set mankind in such a race where heaven or hell is their certain end, and that they should sit down, and loiter, or run after the childish toys of the world, and so much forget the prize that they should run for. Were it but possible for one of us to see the whole of this business, as the All-seeing God doth: to see at one view both heaven and hell, which men are so near, and see what most men in the world are minding, and what they are doing every day, it would be the saddest sight that could be imagined. O how should we marvel at their madness, and lament their self-delusion! O poor distracted world! what is it you run after? and what is it you neglect? If God had never told them what they were sent into the world to do, or whither they were going, or what was before them in another world, then they had been excusable; but he hath told them, over and over, till they were weary of it. Had he left it doubtful, there had been some excuse; but it is his sealed word, and they profess to believe it, and would take it ill of us, if we should question whether they believe it or not.

Beloved, I come not to accuse any of you particularly of this crime; but seeing it is the commonest cause of men's destruction, I suppose you will judge

it the fittest matter for our inquiry, and deserving our greatest care for the cure. To which end I shall, 1. Endeavour the conviction of the guilty. 2. Shall give them such considerations, as may tend to humble and reform them. 3. I shall conclude with such direction, as may help them that are willing, to escape the destroying power of this sin.

First, It is the case of most sinners to think themselves freest from those sins that they are most enslaved to; and one reason why we cannot reform them, is, because we cannot convince them of their guilt. It is the nature of sin, so far to blind and befool the sinner, that he knoweth not what he doth, but thinketh he is free from it when it reigneth in him, or when he is committing it. They are alive to sin, and dead to all the reason, consideration, and resolution, that should recover them, as if it were only by their sinning that we must know they are alive. May I hope that you that hear me to-day are but willing to know the truth of your case, and then I shall be encouraged to proceed to an inquiry. God will judge impartially; why should not we do so? Let me, therefore, by these following questions, try whether none of you are slighters of Christ and your own salvation. And follow me, I beseech you, by putting them close to your own hearts, and faithfully answering them.

1. Things that men highly value will be remembered, they will be matter of their freest and sweetest thoughts.—Do not those, then, make light of Christ and salvation, that think of them so seldom and coldly, in comparison of other things? Follow thy own heart, man, and observe what it

daily runneth after; and then judge whether it make not light of Christ. We cannot persuade men to one hour's sober consideration, what they should do for an interest in Christ, or in thankfulness for his love, and yet they will not believe that they make light of him.

2. Things that we highly value will be matter of our discourse; the judgment and heart will command the tongue. Freely and delightfully will our speech run after them.—Do not those, then, make light of Christ and salvation, that shun the mention of his name, unless it be in a vain or sinful use? Those that love not the company where Christ and salvation is much talked of, but think it troublesome, precise discourse; that had rather hear some merry jests, or idle tales, or talk of their riches or business in the world. When you may follow them from morning to night, and scarcely have a savoury word of Christ, but perhaps some slight and weary mention of him sometimes; judge whether these make not light of Christ and salvation. How seriously do they talk of the world, and speak vanity; but how heartlessly do they make mention of Christ and salvation!

3. The things that we highly value, we would secure the possession of; and therefore would take any convenient course to have all doubts and fears about them well resolved.—Do not those men, then, make light of Christ and salvation, that have lived twenty or thirty years in uncertainty whether they have any part in these or not, and yet never seek out for the right resolution of their doubts? Are all that hear me this day certain they shall be saved? O that

they were! O, had you not made light of salvation, you could not so easily bear such doubtings of it! You could not rest till you had made it sure, or done your best to make it sure. Have you nobody to inquire of, that might help you in such a work? Why, you have ministers that are purposely appointed to that office. Have you gone to them, and told them the doubtfulness of your case, and asked their help in the judging of your condition? Alas! ministers may sit in their studies from one year to another, before ten persons among one thousand will come to them on such an errand! Do not these make light of Christ and salvation? When the Gospel pierceth the heart, indeed, they cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do to be saved?" Trembling and astonished, Paul cries out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And so did the convinced Jews to Peter. But when hear we such questions?

4. The things that we value do deeply affect us, and some motions will be in the heart according to our estimation of them. O sirs, if men made not light of these things, what workings would there be in the hearts of all our hearers! What strange affections would it raise in them to hear of the matters of the world to come! How would their hearts melt before the power of the Gospel! What sorrow would be wrought in the discovery of their sins! What astonishment at the consideration of their misery! What unspeakable joy at the glad tidings of salvation by the blood of Christ! What resolution would be raised in them upon the discovery of their duty! O what hearers should we have, if it

were not for this sin! Whereas, now we are more likely to weary them, or preach them asleep with matters of this unspeakable moment. We talk to them of Christ and salvation, till we make their heads ache: little would one think, by their careless carriage, that they heard and regarded what we said, or thought we spoke at all to them.

5. Our estimation of things will be seen in the diligence of our endeavours. That which we most highly value, we shall think no pains too great to obtain. Do not those men, then, make light of Christ and salvation, that think all too much that they do for them; that murmur at his service, and think it too grievous for them to endure? That ask of his service, as Judas of the ointment, "What need this waste? Cannot men be saved, without so much ado? This is more ado than needs." For the world they will labour all the day, and all their lives; but for Christ and salvation they are afraid of doing too much. Let us preach to them as long as we will, we cannot bring them to relish or resolve upon a life of holiness. Follow them to their houses, and you shall not hear them read a chapter, nor call upon God with their families once a day; nor will they allow him that one day in seven, which he hath separated to his service. But pleasure, or worldly business, or idleness, must have a part. And many of them are so far hardened, as to reproach them that will not be as mad as themselves. And is not Christ worth the seeking? Is not everlasting salvation worth more than all this? Doth not that soul make light of all these, that thinks his ease more worth than they? Let but common sense judge.

6. That which we most highly value, we think we cannot buy too dear: Christ and salvation are freely given, and yet the most of men go without them, because they cannot enjoy the world and them together. They are called but to part with that which would hinder them from Christ, and they will not do it. They are called but to give God his own, and to resign all to his will, and let go the profits and pleasures of this world, when they must let go either Christ or them, and they will not. They think this too dear a bargain, and say they cannot spare these things: they must hold their credit with men; they must look to their estates. How shall they live else? They must have their pleasure, whatsoever becomes of Christ and salvation; as if they could live without Christ better than without these: as if they were afraid of being losers by Christ, or could make a saving match by losing their souls to gain the world. Christ hath told us over and over, that if we will not forsake all for him, we cannot be his disciples. Far are these men from forsaking all, and yet will needs think that they are his disciples indeed.

7. That which men highly esteem, they would help their friends too, as well as themselves. Do not those men make light of Christ and salvation, that can take so much care to leave their children portions in the world, and do so little to help them to heaven! That provide outward necessaries so carefully for their families, but do so little to the saving of their souls? Their neglected children and friends will witness, that either Christ, or their children's souls, or both, were made light of.

8. That which men highly esteem, they will so diligently seek after, that you may see it in the success, if it be a matter within their reach. You may see how many make light of Christ, by the little knowledge they have of him, and the little communion with him, and communication from him; and the little, yea, none, of his special grace in them. Alas! how many ministers can speak it to the sorrow of their hearts, that many of their people know almost nothing of Christ, though they hear of him daily! Nor know they what they must do to be saved. If we ask them an account of these things, they answer as if they understood not what we say to them, and tell us they are no scholars, and therefore think they are excusable for their ignorance. O if these men had not made light of Christ, and their salvation, but had bestowed but half so much pains to know and enjoy him, as they have done to understand the matters of their trades and callings in the world, they would not have been so ignorant as they are: they make light of these things, and therefore will not be at the pains to study or learn them. How will these despisers of Christ and salvation be able one day to look him in the face, and to give an account of these neglects?

Thus much I have spoken in order to your conviction. Do not some of your consciences by this time smite you, and say, "I am the man that have made light of my salvation?" If they do not, it is because you make light of it still, for all that is said to you. But because, if it be the will of the Lord, I would fain have this damning distemper cured, and am loath to leave you in such a desperate condition,

if I knew how to remedy it, I will give you some considerations, which may move you, if you be men of reason and understanding, to look better about you; and I beseech you to weigh them, and make use of them as we go, and lay open your hearts to the work of grace, and sadly bethink you what a case you are in, if you prove such as make light of Christ.

Consider, 1. Thou makest light of him that made not light of thee who didst deserve it. Thou wast worthy of nothing but contempt. As a man, what art thou but a worm to God? As a sinner, thou art far viler than a toad: yet Christ was so far from making light of thee and thy happiness, that he came down into the flesh, and lived a life of suffering, and offered himself a sacrifice to the justice which thou hadst provoked, that thy miserable soul might have a remedy. It is no less than miracles of love and mercy that he hath showed to us: and yet shall we slight them after all?

Angels admire them, whom they less concern, and shall redeemed sinners make light of them? What barbarous, yea, worse than devilish ingratitude is this? The devils never had a Saviour offered them, but thou hast, and dost thou yet make light of him?

2. Consider the work of man's salvation by Jesus Christ, is the masterpiece of all the works of God, wherein he would have his love and mercy to be magnified. As the creation declareth his goodness and power, so doth redemption his goodness and mercy; he hath contrived the very frame of his worship so, that it shall much consist in the magnifying

of this work; and after all this, will you make light of it? "His name is Wonderful." "He did the work that none could do." "Greater love could none show than his." How great was the evil and misery that he delivered us from? The good procured for us? All are wonders, from his birth to his ascension, from our new birth to our glorification, all are wonders of matchless mercy: and yet do you make light of them!

3. You make light of matters of greatest excellency and moment in the world. You know not what it is that you slight: had you well known, you could not have done it. As Christ said to the woman of Samaria, "Hadst thou known who it is that speakest to thee, thou wouldst have asked of him the waters of life." "Had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." So had you known what Christ is, you would not have made light of him; had you been one day in heaven, and but seen what they possess, and seen also what miserable souls must endure that are shut out, you would never surely have made so light of Christ again.

O sirs, it is no trifles or jesting matters that the Gospel speaks of. I must needs profess to you, that when I have the most serious thoughts of these things myself, I am ready to marvel that such amazing matters do not overwhelm the souls of men: that the greatness of the subject doth not so overmatch our understandings and affections, as even to drive men beside themselves, but that God hath always somewhat allayed it by the distance: much more that men should be so stupid as to make light of them. O Lord, that men did but know what everlasting

glory and everlasting torments are; would they then hear us as they do? Would they read and think of these things as they do? I profess I have been ready to wonder, when I have heard such weighty things delivered, how people can forbear crying out in the congregation: much more, how can they rest till they have gone to their ministers, and learned what they should do to be saved, that this great business might be put out of doubt. O that heaven and hell should work no more on men! O that everlastingness should work no more! O how can you forbear, when you are alone, to think with yourselves what it is to be everlastingly in joy or in torment! I wonder that such thoughts do not break your sleep; and that they come not in your mind when you are about your labour! I wonder how you can almost do any thing else! How you can have any quietness in your minds! How you can eat, or drink, or rest, till you have got some ground of everlasting consolations! Is that a man or a corpse that is not affected with matters of this moment? That can be readier to sleep than to tremble, when he heareth how he must stand at the bar of God? That can follow his worldly business, and make nothing of the great business of salvation or damnation; and that when they know it is hard at hand! Truly, sirs, when I think of the weight of the matter, I wonder at the very best of God's saints upon earth that they are no better, and do no more in so weighty a case. I wonder at those whom the world accounteth more holy than needs, and scorns for making too much ado, that they can put off Christ, and their souls with so little: that they pour not out

their souls in every supplication: that they are not more taken up with God; that their thoughts are not more serious in preparation for their account. I wonder that they are not a hundred times more strict in their lives; and more laborious and unwearied in striving for the crown, than they are. And for myself, as I am ashamed of my dull and careless heart, and of my slow and unprofitable course of life; so the Lord knows I am ashamed of every sermon that I preach. When I think what I have been speaking of, and who sent me, and what men's salvation or damnation is so much concerned in, I am ready to tremble, lest God should judge me as a slighter of his truth, and the souls of men, and lest in the best sermon I should be guilty of their blood. Methinks we should not speak a word to men in matters of such consequence without tears, or the greatest earnestness that possibly we can: were not we too much guilty of the sin which we reprove, it would be so. Whether we are alone, or in company, methinks our end, and such an end, should be still in our mind, and as before our eyes; and we should sooner forget any thing, and set light by any thing, or by all things than by this.

4. Who is it that sends this weighty message to you: Is it not God himself? Shall the God of heaven speak, and men make light of it? You would not slight the voice of an angel, or a prince.

5. Whose salvation is it that you make light of? Is it not your own? Are you no more near or dear to yourselves, than to make light of your own happiness or misery? Why, sirs, do you not care whether you be saved or damned? Is self-love

lost? Are you turned your own enemies? As he that slighteth his meat doth slight his life, so, if you slight Christ, whatever you may think, you will find it was your own salvation that you slighted. Hear what he saith, "All they that hate me love death."

6. Your sin is greater, in that you profess to believe the Gospel which you make so light of. For a professed infidel to do it, that believes not that ever Christ died, or rose again, or doth not believe that there is a heaven or hell, this were no such marvel; but for you that make it your creed, and your very religion, and call yourselves Christians, and have been baptized into this faith, and seemed to stand to it, this is the wonder, and hath no excuse. What! believe that you shall live in endless joy or torment, and yet make no more of it to escape torment, and obtain that joy! What! believe that God will shortly judge you, and yet make no more preparation for it! Either say plainly, 'I am no Christian, I do not believe these wonderful things, I will believe nothing but what I see;' or else let your hearts be affected with your belief, and live as you say you do believe. What do you think when you repeat the creed, and mention Christ's judgment and everlasting life?

7. What are these things you set so much by, as to prefer them before Christ, and the saving of your souls? Have you found a better friend, a greater and surer happiness than this? Good Lord! What dung is it that men make so much of, while they set so light by everlasting glory! What toys are they, that they are daily taken up with, while matters of life and death are neglected!

Why, sirs, if you had every one a kingdom in your hopes, what were it, in comparison of the everlasting kingdom? What matter is it, whether you live poor or rich, unless it were a greater matter to die rich than it is? You know well enough that death levels all. What matter is it at judgment, whether you be to answer for the life of a rich man or a poor man? Is Dives then any better than Lazarus? O that men knew what a poor, deceiving shadow they grasp at, while they let go the everlasting substance! The strongest, and richest, and most voluptuous sinners, do but lay in fuel for their sorrows, while they think they are gathering together a treasure. Alas! they are asleep, and dream that they are happy; but when they awake, what a change will they find! Their crown is made of thorns: their pleasure hath such a sting as will stick in the heart through all eternity, except unfeigned repentance do prevent it. O how sadly will these wretches be convinced, ere long, what a foolish bargain they made in selling Christ, and their salvation, for these trifles! Let your farms and merchandise then save you, if they can; and do that for you, that Christ would have done. Cry then to thy Baal to save thee! O what thoughts have drunkards and adulterers, &c. of Christ, that will not part with the basest lust for him! "For a piece of bread," saith Solomon, "such men do transgress."

8. To set so light by Christ, and salvation, is a certain mark that thou hast no part in them, and, if thou so continue, that Christ will set as light by thee: "Those that honour him he will honour, and those that despise him shall be lightly esteemed."

Thou wilt feel one day, that thou canst not live without him. Thou wilt confess then thy need of him; and then thou mayest go look for a Saviour where thou wilt; for he will be no Saviour for thee hereafter, that wouldst not value him, and submit to him here. Then who will prove the loser by thy contempt? O what a thing will it be for a poor miserable soul to cry to Christ for help in the day of extremity, and to hear so sad an answer as this: Thou didst set light by me, and my law, in the day of thy prosperity, and I will now set as light by thee in thy adversity. Read Prov. i. 24. to the end. Thou that, as Esau, didst sell thy birthright for a mess of pottage, shalt then find no place for repentance, though thou seek it with tears. Do you think that Christ shed his blood to save them that continue to make light of it? And to save them that value a cup of drink, or a lust, before his salvation? I tell you, sirs, though you set light by Christ and salvation, God doth not so: he will not give them on such terms as these. He valueth the blood of his Son, and the everlasting glory; and he will make you value them, if ever you have them. Nay, this will be thy condemnation, and leaveth no remedy. All the world cannot save him that sets light by Christ. None of them shall taste of his supper. Nor can you blame him to deny you what you made light of yourselves. Can you find fault, if you miss of the salvation which you slighted?

9. The time is near, when Christ and salvation will not be made light of as now they are. When God hath shaken those careless souls out of their bodies, and you must answer for all your sins in

your own name; O then what would you give for a Saviour! when a thousand bills shall be brought in against you, and none to relieve you; then you will consider, 'O! Christ would now have stood between me and the wrath of God,—had I not despised him, he would have answered all.' When you see the world hath left you, and your companions in sin have deceived themselves and you, and all your merry days are gone; then what would you give for that Christ and salvation that now you account not worth your labour! Do you think when you see the judgment set, and you are doomed to everlasting perdition for your wickedness, that you should then make as light of Christ as now? Why will you not judge now, as you know you shall judge then? Will he then be worth ten thousand worlds, and is he not now worth your estimation, and dearest affection?

10. God will not only deny thee that salvation thou madest light of, but he will take from thee all that which thou didst value before it: he that most highly esteems Christ shall have him, and the creatures, so far as they are good here, and him without the creature hereafter, because the creature is not then useful; and he that sets more by the creature than by Christ, shall have some of the creature without Christ here, and neither Christ nor it hereafter.

So much for these considerations, which may show the true face of this heinous sin.

What think you now, friends, of this business? Do you not see by this time, what a case that soul is in, that maketh light of Christ and salvation? What need, then, is there that you should take

heed, lest this should prove your own case! The Lord knows it is too common a case. Whoever is found guilty, at the last, of this sin, it were better for that man he had never been born. It were better for him he had been a Turk or Indian, that never had heard the name of a Saviour, and that never had salvation offered to him; for such men "have no cloak for their sin." Besides all the rest of their sins, they have this killing sin to answer for, which will undo them. And this will aggravate their misery, that Christ, whom they set light by, must be their Judge, and for this sin will he judge them. O that such would now consider how they will answer that question that Christ put to their predecessors, "How will ye escape the damnation of hell?" or, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Can you escape without a Christ: or will a despised Christ save you then? If he be accursed that sets light by father or mother, what then is he that sets light by Christ? It was the heinous sin of the Jews, that among them were found such as set light by father and mother. But among us, men slight the Father of spirits! In the name of God, brethren, I beseech you to consider how you will then bear his anger which now you make light of!

Hitherto I have been convincing you of the evil of the sin, and the danger that followeth: I come now to know your resolution for the time to come. What say you? Do you mean to set as light by Christ and salvation as hitherto you have done; and to be the same men after all this? I hope not. O let not your ministers, that would fain save you,

be brought in as witnesses against you to condemn you; at least, I beseech you, put not this upon me. Why, sirs, if the Lord shall say to us at judgment, Did you never tell these men what Christ did for their souls, and what need they had of him, and how nearly it did concern them to look to their salvation, that they made light of it? We must needs say the truth: Yea, Lord, we told them of it as plainly as we could; we would have gone on our knees to them, if we had thought it would have prevailed; we did entreat them as earnestly as we could, to consider these things; they heard of these things every day; but, alas! we could never get them to their hearts; they gave us the hearing, but they made light of all that we could say to them. O! sad will it prove on your side, if you force us to such an answer as this. But if the Lord do move the hearts of any of you, and you resolve to make light of Christ no more; or if any of you say, 'We do not make light of him,' let me tell you here, in the conclusion, what you must do, or else you shall be judged as slighters of Christ and salvation.

And, first, I will tell you what will not serve the turn.

1. You may have a notional knowledge of Christ, and the necessity of his blood, and of the excellency of salvation, and yet perish as neglecters of him. This is too common among professed Christians. You may say all that other men do of him; what Gospel passages had Balaam! "Jesus I know, and Paul I know," the very devils could say, who believe and tremble.

2. You may weep at the history of his passion, when you read how he was used by the Jews, and yet make light of him, and perish for so doing.

3. You may come desirously to his word and ordinances. Herod heard gladly; so do many that yet must perish as neglecters of salvation.

4. You may, in a fit of fear, have strong desires after a Christ, to ease you, and to save you from God's wrath, as Saul had of David to play before him; and yet you may perish for making light of Christ.

5. You may obey him in many things, so far as will not ruin you in the world, and escape much of the pollutions of the world by his knowledge, and yet neglect him.

6. You may suffer and lose much for him, so far as leaveth you an earthly felicity: as Ananias, the young man. Some parcels of their pleasures and profits many will part with, in hope of salvation, that shall perish everlastingly for valuing it no more.

7. You may be esteemed, by others, a man zealous for Christ, and loved and admired upon that account, and yet be one that shall perish for making light of him.

8. You may verily think yourselves, that you set more by Christ and salvation than any thing, and yet be mistaken, and be judged as contemners of him: Christ justifieth not all that justify themselves.

9. You may be zealous preachers of Christ and salvation, and reprove others for this neglect, and lament the sin of the world in the like expression as I have done this day, and yet, if you or I have no better evidence to prove our hearty esteem of Christ and salvation, we are undone for all this.

You hear, brethren, what will not serve the turn; will you now hear what persons you must be, if you would not be condemned as slighters of Christ? O search whether it be thus with your souls, or not.

1. Your esteem of Christ and salvation must be greater than your esteem of all the honours, profits, or pleasures of this world, or else you slight him; no less will be accounted sincere, nor accepted to your salvation. Think not this hard, when there is no comparison in the matters esteemed. To esteem the greatest glory on earth before Christ and everlasting glory, is a greater folly and wrong to Christ, than to esteem a dog before your prince, would be folly in you, and a wrong to him. Scripture is plain in this: "He that loveth father or mother, wife, children, house, land, or his own life, more than me, is not worthy of me, and cannot be my disciple."

2. You must manifest this esteem of Christ and salvation, in your daily endeavours and seeking after him, and in parting with any thing that he shall require of you. God is a Spirit, and will not take a hypocritical profession instead of the heart and spiritual service which he commandeth. He will have the heart or nothing; and the chief room in the heart too. These must be had.

If you say that you do not make light of Christ, or will not hereafter; let me try you in these few particulars, whether indeed you mean as you say, and do not dissemble.

1. Will you, for the time to come, make Christ and salvation the chiefest matter of your care and study? Thrust them not out of your thoughts as

a needless or unprofitable subject; nor allow it only some running, slight thoughts, which will not affect you. But will you make it your business, once a day, to bethink you soberly, when you are alone, what Christ hath done for you, and what he will do, if you do not make light of it; and what it is to be everlastingly happy or miserable? And what all things in this world are in comparison of your salvation; and how they will shortly leave you; and what mind you will be then of, and how you will esteem them? Will you promise me, now and then, to make it your business to withdraw yourselves from the world, and set yourselves to such considerations as these? If you will not, are not you slighters of Christ and salvation, that will not be persuaded soberly to think on them? This is my first question to put you to the trial, whether you will value Christ, or not.

2. Will you, for the time to come, set more by the word of God, which contains the discovery of these excellent things, and is your charter for salvation, and your guide thereunto? You cannot set by Christ, but you must set by his word: therefore the despisers of it are threatened with destruction. Will you, therefore, attend to the public preaching of his word; will you read it daily; will you resolve to obey it, whatever it may cost you? If you will not do this, but make light of the word of God, you shall be judged as such as make light of Christ and salvation, whatever you may fondly promise to yourselves.

3. Will you, for the time to come, esteem more of the officers of Christ, whom he hath purposely

appointed to guide you to salvation; and will you make use of them for that end? Alas, it is not to give the minister a good word, and speak well of him, that will serve the turn: it is for the necessity of your souls that God hath set them in his church; that they may be as physicians under Christ, to apply his remedies to your spiritual diseases, not only in public, but also in private: that you may have some to go to for the resolving of your doubts, and for your instruction where you are ignorant, and for the help of their exhortations and prayers. Will you hereafter go to your ministers privately, and solicit them for advice? And if you have not such of your own as are fit, get advice from others; and ask them, What you shall do to be saved? How to prepare for death and judgment? And will you obey the word of God in their mouths? If you will not do this much, nor so much as inquire of those that should teach you, nor use the means which Christ hath established in his church for your help, your own consciences shall one day witness that you were such as made light of Christ and salvation. If any of you doubt whether it be your duty thus to ask counsel of your teachers, as sick men do of their physicians, let your own necessities resolve you, let God's express word resolve you; see what is said of the priests of the Lord, even before Christ's coming, when much of their work did lie in ceremonials: "My covenant was with him of life and peace: and I gave them to him (to Levi) for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and

equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priests' lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."

Nay, you must not only inquire, and submit to their advice, but also to their just reprehensions, and church censures: and, without proud repining, submit to the discipline of Christ in their hands, if it shall be used in the congregations whereof you are members.

4. Will you, for the time to come, make conscience of daily and earnest prayer to God, that you may have a part in Christ and salvation? Do not go out of doors till you have breathed out these desires to God; do not lie down to rest till you have breathed out these desires; say not, God knoweth my necessity without so often praying; for though he do, yet he will have you to know them, and feel them, and exercise your desires and all the graces of his Spirit in these duties: it is he that hath commanded to pray continually, though he know your needs without it. Christ himself spent whole nights in prayer, and encourageth us to this course. If you will not be persuaded to this much, how can you say that you make not light of Christ and salvation?

5. Will you, for the time to come, resolvedly cast away your known sins at the command of Christ? If you have been proud, or contentious, or malicious, and revengeful, be so no more. If you have been adulterers, or swearers, be so no more. You cannot hold these, and yet obtain Christ and salvation. What say you? Are you resolved to let them go? If not, when you know it is the will of Christ, and

he hath told you such shall not enter into his kingdom, do not you make light of him?

6. Will you, for the time to come, serve God in the dearest as well as in the cheapest part of his service? Not only with your tongues, but with your purses and your deeds? Shall the poor find that you set more by Christ than this world? Shall it appear in any good uses that God calls you to be liberal in, according to your abilities? "Pure religion, and undefiled, before God, is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." Will you resolve to stick to Christ, and make sure this work of salvation, though it cost you all that you have in the world? If you think these terms too dear, you make light of Christ, and will be judged accordingly.

7. Will you, for the time to come, make much of all things that tend to your salvation; and take every help that God offereth you, and gladly make use of all his ordinances? Attend upon his strengthening sacraments, spend the Lord's own day in these holy employments; instruct your children and servants in these things; get into good company that set their faces heavenward, and will teach you the way, and help you thither: and take heed of the company of wicked scorners, or foolish, voluptuous fleshly men, or any that would hinder you in this work. Will you do these things? Or will you show that you are slighters of Christ by neglecting them?

8. Will you do all this with delight; not as your toil, but as your pleasure? And take it for your highest honour that you may be Christ's disciples, and may be admitted to serve and worship him; and

rejoice with holy confidence in the sufficiency of that sacrifice by which you may have pardon of all your failings, and right to the inheritance of the saints in light? If you will do these things sincerely, you will show that you value Christ and salvation, else not.

Dearly beloved in the Lord, I have now done that work which I came upon; what effect it hath, or will have upon your hearts, I know not, nor is it any further in my power to accomplish that which my soul desireth for you. Were it the Lord's will that I might have my wish herein, the words that you have this day heard should so stick by you, that the secure should be awakened by them, and none of you should perish by the slighting of your salvation. I cannot now follow you to your several habitations to apply this word to your particular necessities; but O that I could make every man's conscience a preacher to himself, that it might do it, which is ever with you: that the next time you go prayerless to bed, or about your business, conscience might cry out, 'Dost thou set no more value on Christ and thy salvation?' That the next time you are tempted to think hardly of a holy and diligent life, (I will not say to deride it as more ado than needs,) conscience might cry out to thee, 'Dost thou set so light by Christ and thy salvation?' That the next time you are ready to rush upon known sin, and to please your fleshly desires against the command of God, conscience might cry out, 'Is Christ and salvation no more worth, than to cast them away, or venture them for thy lusts?' That when you are following the world with your most eager desires,

forgetting the world to come, and the change that is a little before you, conscience might cry out to you, 'Is Christ and salvation no more worth than this?' That when you are next spending the Lord's-day in idleness or vain sports, conscience might tell you what you are doing. In a word, that in all your neglects of duty, your sticking at the supposed labour or cost of a godly life; yea, in all your cold and lazy prayers and performances, conscience might tell you how unsuitable such endeavours are to the reward, and that Christ and salvation should not be so slighted. I will say no more at this time, but this, It is a thousand pities, that when God hath provided a Saviour for the world, and when Christ hath suffered so much for their sins, and made so full a satisfaction to justice, and purchased so glorious a kingdom for his saints, and all this is offered so freely to sinners, to lost unworthy sinners, even for nothing, that yet so many millions should everlastingly perish, because they made light of their Saviour and salvation, and prefer the vain world and their lusts before them. I have delivered my message, the Lord open your hearts to receive it. I have persuaded you with the word of truth and soberness, the Lord persuade you more effectually, or else all this is lost.

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